

Selection from:

Isolated Experiences: Gilles Deleuze and the Solitudes of Reversed Platonism

Writing Bodies

After to write, me. To write generates me as a subject to express itself. The to write possesses. Over the horizon of all the bodies that have been subjected to invasions--emotional, mystical, and physical--there agitates a more extreme version.

For Scott Fitzgerald, writing was the possessing verb; he literally owed his life to it. This means more than romantic and hackneyed propositions like "writing was the most important thing in his life" or "he lived to write." Those sentences do not go nearly far enough because they imply Fitzgerald existed independent of the figure bent over the typewriter. They imply that writing was something Fitzgerald invested himself in, something he attacked with gusto and devoted himself to. The real story is less glorious. It starts like this: Fitzgerald, as a writer, lived entirely within the structure of being the infinitive "to write" projects into substantial existence. When he was working, Fitzgerald's material surroundings constricted drastically. On the other side of the choked off reality the fictional reality of his book expanded. It is that reality which surges back into the world of things to make typing fingers and eyes following along after the new sentences. What is the experience of this writing Fitzgerald? In any creative writing class, the first thing every student learns is to imagine a scene as strongly and completely as possible before beginning. The strength of this imagination can be gauged by the remove it sets you from your immediate physical surroundings, the furniture nearby, your posture in it, the weather outside, whether you are hungry or thirsty. As these things fall away, the corresponding imagination is gaining intensity and a fictional reality gains texture and color. Then, as displayed by the physical book being written, the ephemeral writing energy comes back across to the material world and resurrects the body that had been abandoned to the imagination. My own characteristics which had been effaced so that my conjured characters could have believable, but different qualities, my own hands which had been amputated so that my characters may occupy themselves differently, my face which drooped expressionlessly so my characters could smile and frown and color, my body which slumped so my characters could stand and sit and hurry, now they all return to me. They come back into being, through the expanding book, as my fingers moving and typing, my face leering at the screen, my body poised over the keypad. It is because of the book--because of my absorption by writing--that my own hands move and my own face tightens and my own body contracts and my own writing identity rises. The imaginative world causes and

vivifies the material world. The writing vivifies the writer. Most important, I am not writing; the writing storms through, bringing fingers to life in its wake. On Deleuze's ontological plane titled difference, where philosophy has lost its global force while preserving the right to discuss the origins of experience, a limited account claims legitimacy: during those minutes of pouring words, my physical existence is because I write.

Meanwhile, another Fitzgerald, one who went to the market and courted Zelda and lived from day to day, was historical and substantive. His material body preceded any action he undertook like his stable identity preceded the projects he invested himself in. In language, he was structured by nouns. He was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1896. He lived on the city's most prestigious avenue, in a house one tenth the size of his neighbor's. He went to high school at Saint Paul Academy, enrolled in Princeton, joined the army and sometime thereafter doubled. The multiplying was not one Fitzgerald giving birth to another, like both could be traced back to a common root; the new, writing Fitzgerald existed irreconcilably with the historical version. While the substantial identity biographers trace went about living the exotic life of a wildly successful author in Paris and an expatriate on the Riviera, another Fitzgerald in another dimension lived under writing's sway. This latter Fitzgerald did not write to finish the story, to prove his talent, to redeem his relatively underprivileged youth, to make money, to attract women, to create immortality. If those things happened, they happened back on the dimension of the man who put his substance before his action and his unified identity before his productive changes.

So, two distinct Fitzgeralds: one was born every time writing began and evaporated when the day's last sheet turned out of the typewriter. The other was born in St. Paul, married Zelda, had his name on the cover of famous books.

The writing Fitzgerald existed on plane without space and time. Again, what is this like? As a writer, Fitzgerald may have seemed to have been at the typewriter for twenty minutes while the watch on his wrist might have registered seventy-five minutes. Seventy-five minutes is vital to the man who lives inside schedules. But it holds no consequence for the author. This experienced dichotomy symbolizes the entire disjunction between nouns and verbs. Like substantives and infinitives, Fitzgerald's two times split. The scene does not call for an Heideggerian analysis of temporality, this is not an authentic kind of time reified by ontic, irresolute society into clock time. Abandon conciliatory projects. On one dimension there is twenty minutes, on another, seventy-five. Because of the separate temporalities, it makes no sense to try reconciling our common world with this writing Fitzgerald appearing and disappearing. True, you can say time is still essentially the same for the writer, just a stretched or contracted version of the hands turning on the historical figure's wristwatch, but that misses the point. The point is, for the writer, it doesn't matter whether you were working thirty minutes or three hours. You can't tell the difference. And even if you could, even if you agreed the writer's time was the real time or the substantive time was the real time, where does the novel's time fit in? If Fitzgerald wrote for seventy-five minutes--which seemed like twenty minutes--and covered four days of Gatsby's life, how long did he write? Twenty minutes? Seventy-five minutes? Four days? Enough to say writing used the hands and the machine it could work. The same on the subject of place; it makes no sense to ask where he did the writing. Enough to say writing used the hands and the machine it could work. Of course, we can look at the various static locations: St. Paul, Princeton, Paris, Antibes, but they mean nothing. Fitzgerald could have been at Princeton, Princeton could have been at Fitzgerald. Common sense subjects and predicates are only accidental qualities the writing inhabits and claims for itself and makes as an extension of itself. Trim the biography of every author to one word: writing.

The problem with the Fitzgerald born from the infinitive and only subsequently embodied in nouns, is that the infinitive is itself evanescent, transient, and viewable principally through its effects. And because the writing never appears without the substantive body, there ensues a temptation to confuse the effect for the cause, a temptation to privilege nouns over verbs, to privilege the historical Fitzgerald over the writer, to privilege the physical body over the infinitive force, to say Fitzgerald writes instead of writing is Fitzgerald. Still, the infinitive does manifest itself. And not just as a negative theology, not just as determined through a string of nots: not substantial, not individual, etc. Listen to Ernest Hemingway, he has seen and positively chronicled the writer:

[Fitzgerald] had told me at the Closerie des Lilas how he wrote what he thought were good, and which really were good stories for the [Saturday Evening] Post, and then changed them for submission, knowing exactly how he must make the twists that made them into salable magazine stories. I had been shocked at this and I said I thought it was whoring. He said it was whoring but that he had to do it as he made his money from the magazines to have money ahead to write decent books. I said I did not believe any one could write any way but the best he could write without destroying his talent. Since he wrote the real story first, he said, the destruction and changing of it that he did at the end did him no harm.

Hemingway clearly sees the two Fitzgeralds. One is writing, a man coming into existence so that the words of really good stories can make it from the verb's dimension onto a blank piece of paper. The other Fitzgerald wakes up like from a dream, finds the stories already substantially written and hacks them into form for the magazine, for the money, for the notoriety. Publicity is the destination. But the writing Fitzgerald shuns publicity, he is reclusive. He is also those things Deleuze has already listed pertaining to the infinitive's dimension: pre-individual, non-personal, and a-conceptual. He belongs to extra-being, he exists as an effect.

A specific effect is *The Great Gatsby*. This book is both palpable, material object and infinitive expression. The writing Fitzgerald produced *The Great Gatsby*, the substantive, material Fitzgerald needed the book to sell. That makes two Fitzgeralds and two different books, but between them exists only one, the *Gatsby* published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1925. Thus, with *Gatsby*, the material Fitzgerald meets his own extra-being; the two Fitzgeralds relate across this one text. Implicit in their meeting is the monumentally significant convergence of things and events, of substantives and infinitives. Hemingway remembers:

Scott was puzzled and hurt that the book was not selling well but, as I said, he was not at all bitter then, and he was both shy and happy about the book's quality.

This man who was not bitter, who was shy and who was happy was a verb. In a flash, the writing shows through the features and words of the historical Fitzgerald who suffered puzzlement and hurt that sales, and thus income, were not meeting expectations. Hemingway's report recounts the fleeting moment when the writer allows itself to be seen and even speaks through the mouth and expression of a historical man always tied to material things and usually dominated by them.

Years later the infinitive deserted, leaving the historical Fitzgerald destitute; he struggled forward. In this later time, after writing left, Fitzgerald found himself in Hollywood. His wife was insane. His stories and books failed to excite publishers and simply writing them for their own sake was

no longer possible. He tried writing movie scripts. But the substantive man simply could not write. He had no talent. What does this mean, to be talentless? Under the verb's regime, talent does not register a capability, like something a body can do. It indicates susceptibility, susceptibility to possession by the infinitive. Talent for writing is not something you have and something you can express, it is something that has you and expresses you. Talent for writing is being a conduit for "to write."

The substantial Fitzgerald could chop first-rate prose into pulp fiction, but when writing disappeared, and he had to write from nothing, nothing good came. Hemingway watched from a distance. He recalled it melodramatically, but also clearly:

[Fitzgerald's] talent was as natural as the pattern that was made by the dust on a butterfly's wings. At one time he understood it no more than the butterfly did and he did not know when it was brushed or marred. Later he became conscious of his damaged wings and of their construction and he learned to think and could not fly anymore because the love of flight was gone and he could only remember when it had been effortless.

The transition Hemingway records goes from writing possessing a man to a man who tries to write. It goes from the verb generating the subject to the subject making the verb. In human terms, the transformation moves from the Fitzgerald writing Gatsby to the Fitzgerald pecking away at an enemy typewriter for some Hollywood studio. Of course, the hack Fitzgerald had been there all along, but he is no longer occasionally displaced by writing itself, no longer displaced a writing that produces words and books and him in the absence of substantive reasons or motivations.

Hemingway's lesson is simple, writing possesses. Writing requires surrendering identity, and not just the shallow surrender requisite to writing about others, not just the surrender to a different dialect or a different background or a different race or another sex. To write the way Fitzgerald wrote means surrendering yourself to something entirely inhuman, something as foreign to substantive humanity as the infinitive verb.

Possession by the Infinitive

Possession by the infinitive occurs everywhere. Take a walk or a hike. Walks begin with a defining set of nouns: the people going, where they will go, when they will return. After stabilizing all those static and preliminary items, we allow the verb to enter and legs begin moving. But sometimes, on long walks over uneven terrain on hot days, the moving itself leaps through and takes over. Remember a hike taken along a dirt path occasionally blocked by a fallen tree and constantly diverted by rocks and the earth's own jutting shape. This hike starts out as a walk, with you and your goal and your mind regulating each step on the way to the end. Eventually you get thirsty. But your water is gone. The sun gets hotter. Your hat soaks through. You wipe your forehead with your sleeve, but the sleeve is already dripping. Your shirt pastes across your chest. Your destination slips out of focus. Each step requires complete concentration. The temporal horizon shrinks. You started out with the whole day in mind, then narrowed that to the next hour and now you can only think of the next step. The horizon contracts to zero. A reversal of polarities takes place and you are no longer planning each step; the step is directing you. You are no longer there to walk, but the walk is going on and you are following along for the ride. You no longer map progress, no more destination. Legs move automatically. You are the pure event of hiking; the hiking, the movement is controlling. You are locomotion--your self, your identity arises from the fact legs are moving, avoiding boulders, stretching over fallen tree limbs.

When we rationalize an experience like this, we attribute the possession to lightheadedness caused by fatigue and the sun. But, instead of denigrating these moments as times when the body and consciousness failed or stuttered in the face of harsh conditions, think of them as times when motion came alive, driven by the force of pure event, the infinitive "to hike" possessed you in the name of the sun and the heat. During these fleeting moments the body thrives while dismissing cumbersome burdens of identity, destinations, and programs. Eventually, there comes a point when the body stops for rest. This is not a rational decision, you don't think, "now I'll stop." You find yourself plopped on a rock. The motion stopped itself. A temporary endpoint or destination has been produced from the hiking. Rather than saying we hike to reach the endpoint, say the destination arises because we are hiking. The fatigue produced from the hiking fashions the destination. The substantial place and pause has followed from the motion. And only now, in the pause the motion has made, do you regain a sense of your body as finite and yourself as its captain.

Lecture

The same on the philosophy circuit, giving papers at a conference or in a colloquium series. At least when you're young and just starting out and nervous, you read and then find yourself answering questions and under the pressure and in the excitement and as your mind rapidly fatigues, you stop thinking through your responses. They ask and you answer. You amount to nothing more than the ideas spilling out; instead of you constructing answers, the answers construct you. You stop defining yourself as a controlling locus exercising decisions; you start defining yourself by what you have said because you are watching and critiquing yourself just like they are. It is only now, in the wake of responding, that you can be defined because it is only now, subsequently, that you exist. True, your body was out there even before you started, but that body is gone now, wiped out of being. Responding gives you a new one: look at your hands gesturing awkwardly, shaking, feel your lips tighten, your mouth getting drier and drier, a sheen of nervous perspiration. Where is the water glass? Why is it so hot? The experience is not your having a body that responds, that gestures, that shakes, that sweats; responding, gesturing, shaking, sweating makes your body and you. They define you. The proof? You hear yourself answering a question and you feel yourself cringing inside, saying to yourself, knowing, "Oh, oh, there's something wrong with this position being staked out, there's something wrong with this position I'm staking out..."

Infinitive Moves

In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze repeatedly associates his pure events with phantasms. Socrates used "phantasm" to disdainfully name things coming into being independent their ideal inspiration; he banished them from his city. Deleuze argues for bringing the phantasm's category back into active philosophy.

Begin by tying the phantasm to the infinitive. On the level of our common experience, which is run by substantives and organized by categories amenable to stasis, the infinitive appears with a conspicuous trademark: evanescence. Deleuze pushes this mood to the limit by injecting suggestive words like quasi-causality into his writing:

Events are never causes of one another, but rather enter the relations of quasi-causality, an unreal and ghostly causality...

We are verging on the occult. Infinitives connect with events connect with phantasms connect with ghosts. Ghosts, even though they are here and now, cannot be. Their mystical existence in the present juxtaposed with their real, physical existence in the past spins vertigo. We lose the bearing of time.

Simply as a logical matter, ghosts should set two epoches at odds by eliciting our demanding questions: which is your real time, in what year do you actually live, were you real then, as a physical woman on earth, or are you real presently, as a roaming spirit? But what does the ephemeral ghost care about these things? These are noun, substantial questions. A crack that has always been there widens out, not one between the material human of the past and the spirit you see now, but between the philosopher who asks questions on this subject and the philosopher that doesn't, between the philosophy that sees a temporal contradiction in the ghost and the philosophy that just sees a ghost. What a ghost does is not so much threaten the there and then with the here and now by appearing in both, it rattles the certainty of any time and place; it throws into question the value of time and place.

Experience splits onto two dimensions, one with fundamentally important times and places, one without. One that starts from time and place, and one that enters times and places accidentally. One ruled by stable things you can really touch, by questions about what is real, the other ruled by ghostly causes and the unreal. One ruled by nouns, one ruled by verbs. One with possession invading bodies already living at certain locations in certain years, one with possession making bodies and spreading locations and years about itself. One with solid people, one with spirits. Occasionally, these dimensions curve together and experience reverses; consciousness governed by substantive control over action gives in to a usually fleeting moment of infinitive control over things. On the hike, that moment was tagged as lightheadedness or extreme fatigue. These derogatory names and their phenomena fit into the same box as the occult and phantasms, the box marked as slag extraneous to the real and important aspects of life. Only on narrow bands of the world, among strenuous hikers and possessed writers can these phenomena gain positive definition. For the writer Fitzgerald, the moment the verb curves into the plane of nouns the fingers spring to life and paragraphs appear. Time and hunger and location and responsibilities and the other concerns of normally ticking subjects vanish.

Two Daisies

Two dimensions. And two choices: one, we can deconstruct them, tie them to each other, make them into masters and slaves. This can go on forever. Or, we can use them. We can work one of the privileges, penetrate it and see where it functions positively to read and transform the world. The second, practical choice is always Deleuze's. I follow him.

American literature permits us a grand figure of infinitive possession, Gatsby. His verb: to desire. It surfaces through Daisy. He met her before the war, he was sent to Europe, the allies won, he tried to return, but was diverted to England by military capriciousness. He passed his days at Oxford relentlessly beseeching the bureaucracy for release to come back States-side. While his petitions for leave were threading through levels of command, Daisy met and married Tom Buchanan. By the time Gatsby arrived in America, Tom and Daisy and their infinite money had vanished into the nascent world of American beautiful people. Years later, Gatsby tracked her down. He bought a grand mansion directly across from hers on Long Island sound. Eventually, he schemes a way to meet and they begin again. Tom finds out. The argument ensues:

"Your wife doesn't love you," said Gatsby. "She's never loved you. She loves me."

"You must be crazy," exclaimed Tom automatically.... "Daisy loved me when she married me and she loves me now."

"No," said Gatsby, shaking his head.... "Daisy, that's all over now," he said earnestly. "It doesn't matter anymore. Just tell [Tom] the truth--that you never loved him--and its all wiped out forever."

She looked at [Gatsby] blindly. "Why--how could I love him--possibly?"

"You never loved him."
She hesitated.

Her hesitation gives us time to see two independent Daisies. The first is substantive. To this one, when Gatsby pleads, "Just tell him the truth--that you never loved him," the sentence outlines a field of competition between discreet and precedent subjects--Gatsby and Tom--for Daisy's affection. What they tell each other is strictly within their control and a product of their substantial selves. This reading starts with the material present as particular woman and men, and we understand their acts as cast from their static beings and continuous identities. Thus, we see characters manically trying to mold their current situations to the fixed dreams they hold.

The second Daisy comes from fluid desire. Not Daisy desires Tom, or Daisy desires Gatsby; desire, and therefore Gatsby and Tom and Daisy. This story could as easily manifest itself as Daisy desiring Gatsby or Gatsby desiring Tom. But though the specific arrangements are accidental they are not irrelevant. Here, Fitzgerald diverges slightly from Carroll. Each desire-fueled version of Gatsby retains a difference from the others, but nonetheless, through them all, Gatsby desires Daisy, Daisy desires Tom, desire comes first and arranges the players as a locus for itself and as a by-product of its fervid expression.

On this second, Deleuzean dimension, the players, Daisy for example, no longer have a character or anything independent of the roving desire momentarily surfacing to make them. I can no longer write "Daisy is aloof" or "Daisy is indecisive" or "Daisy is careless," because herself, Daisy is nothing. Start with desire, desire manifested as Daisy and then expanding again into her identifying characteristics. So, I can again write "Daisy is aloof," but only with the understanding that desire makes her to be so. Instead of Daisy controlling her public image, she is the localized project of an impersonal force. If desire leaves, she leaves too. On this reading, Gatsby's insistence, "Just tell [Tom] the truth--that you love me," no longer reveals a competition between two men for one woman, Gatsby is not verifying his hope with some frozen, substantial reality. The desire working here makes a Daisy that never loved Tom. The Daisy made by desire could do nothing but repeat to Tom the thrust of Gatsby's words because Gatsby's very insistence is the force making her. Importantly, the insistence does not belong to Gatsby either, the insistence makes him too. Daisy and Gatsby are little more than the imperative sentence. In this version of desire's story, we attribute the sentence to Gatsby, and place Daisy on the receiving end. But that could be reversed. And this reversal is not of the deconstructive or dialectic variety because it carries no opposition and almost no philosophic relevance (though it does carry literary relevance). Reversibility is only a symptom of a certain ontological stage Deleuze calls difference, difference manifested here as desire.

According to the rules of desire, the characters have no volition because they are nothing but infinitive volition. It is not that the characters have been sapped of the ability to act, no privitive negative inhabits difference; the verb has overwhelmed the characters and left them with no choice but to act, and act in accordance with the single wave of desire forming the entire episode.

At the story's crucial moment, Daisy hesitates. The words Gatsby insist she say do not come. But desire insists they must. Everything hangs in the balance. Which Daisy will continue? If she repeats Gatsby's sentence, she has already been abandoned to the desire that drove him all these years. If she refuses to say the words, she claims herself as a material woman who controls her actions. The choice is between two dimensions: the infinitive and the substantive.

Gatsby

Gatsby is unique because, for him, there is no choice. He lives exclusively in the infinitive, as a product of desire. The objects constructed for Gatsby to desire changed through time, first it was a desire for the privilege and hauteur only old money can provide. Later it was desire for Daisy. Either way, Gatsby was nothing in himself. This is not pejorative. Gatsby was one of the many locations desire finds for itself on earth. Desire made him to change his name from Jimmy Gatz to Jay Gatsby, it made him to claim he was an Oxford man when he had only spent several months there waiting for the army to send him home, it made him to claim Daisy never loved Tom but loved only him. According to the desire channeling through Gatsby, all these things were true, they had to be, it is tautological because desire made all the things. On the other dimension, little of it was true.

Reading

When reading Fitzgerald's book, you could as easily read that Gatsby makes his famous parties or the famous parties make him. In a literal sense, it is Gatsby that provides the place and the prohibition-era alcohol. But it is the grand mansion and the notable guests that make Gatsby the mythical and intriguing figure. This is a quibbling distinction, however, in view of the massive divide between noun and verb privilege. The verb insists desire makes both Gatsby and the parties. On this Deleuzean dimension, the pleasure of reading lies in drawing close to the fleeting and mysterious verb. The work of reading follows after in determining what the philosophic conditions for this force are, what kind of experience it makes, and how it can be invited into the normally substantial world. On the other dimension, which belongs to the substantive, the pleasure of reading lies in drawing up close to the characters, in relating to them and seeing what they are made from. The work of reading lies in explaining just why it is that certain characters act as they do since all their actions must be traceable to a static and almost material object we call their personal identity.

Infinitive Inhumanity

The infinitive's dimension excludes humanity. By humanity, I mean the humanistic and existential version of the subject. For the humanistic subject, experience begins from the integrity of a certain embodied self that aspires, suffers, hopes, accomplishes. Even in the extremely flat case, think of Camus's stranger, his actions are bizarre, but still distinctly his. In the end he suffers in his own way for them. On the inhuman, infinitive dimension, a coherent story focused on elaborating the acts and consequences belonging to Camus's protagonist would be tenuous because of the verb's intrinsic anonymity. The anonymity begins with the infinitive's promiscuity, it skips from first person to third and then to animals and things. Polymorphous applicability betrays faith in the regular subject. Like the infinitive itself, the verb-driven storyline can skip from character to character, one individual may act, another may continue that action, still a third may end it. This kind of book would have no central protagonists, only lines of personified action grinding through the machine created by the book's central verb. Protagonism will be like fame: everybody will have it for fifteen minutes. The characters fade, the operating mechanism of being famous endures. Not a character, and not fame itself, but being famous, this is the protagonist. Substantial individuals enter solely to give the action a place. Then they cycle through.

Humanity is reducing to a very different absurdity than Camus wrote. For Camus, the trademark of absurdity was its recognition. We, as readers, recognize the impossibility of the human condition because God died and rationality failed. On the infinitive dimension, we are denied even Camus's recognition because no subject exists at the story's center to crystalize the

lessons in futility. Something as anonymous and alien as an infinitive verb has monopolized the plotline and claimed any lessons for itself.

The inhuman character of the verb reaches an even starker manifestation with time. In *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze breaks temporality into *chronos* and *aion*. *Chronos* is the time Socrates lived in and tried to control. It fills with substantives. In theory, it is the shortest of times, it is the infinitely fast and always passing moment we call now. In practice, *chronos* projects into the future and drags along the past. To gain hold of the many *nows* to come, it employs plans, aspirations, predictions. To drag behind, it relies on memories, lessons, customs. Thus, *chronos*, the time that should be razor quick, stretches itself out. Still, it is the present moment.

Aion belongs to the infinitive verb. It is the vast composition of future and past as it reaches out to eternity. The *aion* does not include the present, it does not stretch from the past to the future through all the moments in history. The *aion* presents a differentiating block occupying a temporal level separate from now. What purpose does it serve? First, it is a conceptual necessity; it is only because we have the *aion* that *chronos* can understand itself as moving. It is only because there is a past as past that the present can carry the movement necessary to implying a past that every now falls into. And it is only because there is a future as future that the now can imply a movement forward. Because we have the *aion*, the present can come to be and pass away. But even though *aion* provides space for past and future, it is not itself exactly past and future; it is a plane constantly expanding outward but limited in the middle. So, paradoxically, while *aion* enjoys unrestrained access to everything that has been or will be, it never enters the present. Its motion is a constant peeling away from that one temporal state that disassociates from it. Still, the unconquerable sliver of time is not *aion*'s lack, it is not a break down the center of a great block; the present marks the passage to a foreign dimension. *Chronos* and *aion* are irreducible. One dashes from now to now, the other rests comfortably in the swing through eternity--though a very different eternity than the one Socrates promised to his philosophic soul. Socrates's eternity held nouns and static conditions. Deleuze's *aion* flows with infinitives, it fills eternity with impersonal verb action, with cutting and writing and desiring.

Like *chronos*, *aion* presses its own limits. Where *chronos* stretches the maximum from its present, *aion* is pinching impossibly close on both sides. Remember the cut. To cut belongs to *aion*, to that vast space of quasi-timeoutside now. We never see the cut, it is never happening. But we see the forearm immediately before and after, we see the knife, we see the blood, we even see the skin splitting clean on either side of the sharp edge. Still, nowhere in all this is the cut itself. So too with desire: we see Gatsby, we hear about his grand mansion and opulent parties, we know he does all this after being possessed by the verb, but we never see the actual verb. Fitzgerald understood this and communicated it opaquely when he wrote the book; he cloaked Daisy and Gatsby's original falling in love in the ill-defined past, before the principal storyline began. Fitzgerald also had Gatsby understand the love as always something in the future, as a state he never reached--this is the green light at the end of the dock, it glows from the *aion*. Daisy, like Daisy and Gatsby together, existed all along, but only in the past and in the future that could never arrive in the present. Fitzgerald's famous lines:

He did not know that [Daisy] was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us.

Desire made this scene, and did so in accordance with its own time that never touches now, even while always squeezing close, squeezing as close as Daisy's moment of hesitation and Gatsby's sturdy aspiration.

Listen to Gatsby reminisce, he reflects on a reality that could be sensible only in the infinitive's dimension and on the plane of time unhinged from the present:

"What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I was going to do?"

We could simply shift a few words in this sentence to come up with another one just as true: what was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I had done?

Gatsby: the man perpetually floating in the past and future. He is a man, but because of his strange time, not human. Everything that defines him, old money, mad love, an Oxford education, they belong to extra being, to the never quite here.

Possession

The infinitive's time zone is Gatsby's deepest secret and the secret to the possession preceding him. At some point before the book began, Gatsby was a man who acted in the present and lived where people controlled their deeds. Fitzgerald tells us he was Jimmy Gatz then, a Midwestern boy in a dirt poor family. Three transformations swept across this subject, all at approximately the same historical moment: his name changed to Jay Gatsby, he entered the military, he met Daisy. These events fit together, they offer perspectives on the cataclysmic occurrence shoving Gatsby into infinitive reality: his possession by the verb "to desire." Everything changes.

The most obvious biographical sign of possession is the name switch. A given name claims to have the power of stockpiling. Over the years, continued gathering allows Jimmy Gatz to assume an increasingly palpable and definable material being. Like he accrues memories, Jimmy Gatz assumes a personality. As a result, he becomes predictable: he is quick to anger, charitable, calculating, determined. The various patterns making up his identity push into increasingly sharp clarity as the passing years allow each characteristic to carve its signature deeper. At a theoretical extreme, the process will be complete and, if nouns control verbs, every action will reach perfect predictability. His name change mocks that predictability, it loudly renounces everything a real name values, especially the accumulated identity names explicitly warehouse. Because Gatsby has renounced accumulated, material being, there is no longer anything about him you could pick up and say, "Ah, here is the man." True, he surrounded himself with artifacts seeming to play defining roles: a vast mansion, a library stocked with sophisticated books, upper-crust friends. But all these things were counterfeits. The mansion was old, but Gatsby's money was not. The books were the kind an Oxford man would read, but Gatsby was only in Oxford for several months. The legion friends were always at the parties, but when Gatsby died, only one appeared to mourn. Gatsby as a stable identity had, and was, nothing. He had no books that meant anything, no friends that endured, no past he could admit, no character that was his own, no true present moment, and, like a summation of it all, no real name.

To imply Gatsby's slip into the infinitive, Fitzgerald also uses the military into which Gatsby was so disastrously inducted. What happens when you are inducted? Your hair comes off, then your clothes. You are bathed, issued shoes, socks, underwear, pants, shirts, hats, and guns indistinguishable from those given to the recruit in front and the one coming after. You get a number and now this is all you have. Board a bus with everybody else who all might as

well be you. Like the army strips away your physical appearance, the infinitive destroys everything personal, everything you have and everything allowing you control. Still, this military version of anonymity is inadequate to the experience of possession. When the military levels you, it starts with the assumption people have unique and incorruptible characters. Elaborate psychological means are then utilized to minimize the uniqueness. The infinitive dimension bypasses such procedures, it simply refuses to acknowledge any formative individual character. Entering the infinitive means thoroughgoing anonymity. It means you are nothing and have never been anything and never will be anything but what the verb makes you. Possession.

When Gatsby fell for Daisy, he slipped out of the material present and into the verb's aion. He slipped from a man who had a character to a desire that had a man. He shifted from the land of humanity to the time zone of the inhuman, a time with a past and a future that repels the reality of now. For readers of Fitzgerald's book, the first temptation is to report that the Daisy Gatsby loved was his own creation, she became his version of the ideal woman so many men have seen flickers of in their various lovers but never successfully arrived at. According to this story, they met, fell in love, the war pulled them apart and in her absence his memory inflated. From then on, their love was ruined because she had become more than any woman could be. I deny this plot. A verb conjured up both Gatsby and Daisy and their love from a dimension no material man or woman will ever touch. Rather than starting out as an attractive woman, Daisy started with Gatsby in the evanescent and inhuman realm of desire. This doomed them. They never happened together because even when their material bodies and static identities met, they could not get together because they were never in the present; they were always being tugged apart by an origin disallowing the present. This is the philosophic complement to the social reality Fitzgerald won fame for writing. This is like the ambitious Midwestern boy trying to match the old-money, establishment woman. There is always something back there, something they can't entirely overcome, some internal difference in the core of their love. In society, the difference pulls through disparities in clothing and wealth and lineage and refinement and manner. In philosophy, the internal difference is an unconquerable disparity isolating material bodies from the evanescent verb. According to this philosophic story, even when Gatsby and Daisy whispered and touched, they were still not together because they both also traced back to origins without the tangible substance requisite to physically being together. Their delineable, corporeal identities were born from pre-singular, impersonal desire. This mismatch is the true cause of their futility. And this is the true meaning of possession: material bodies and a desperate love and a bestselling book all owing their existence to a force manifested in language as the infinitive.