

# Gatsby's Gorgeous Car: Objects and the Outsider in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Fiction

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Arts and Sciences Honors Program

Gatsby's Gorgeous Car:  
Objects and the Outsider  
in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Fiction

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## INTRODUCTION

Both F. Scott Fitzgerald, writing most of his fiction in the years between the two world wars, and myself, writing in the digital age, have experienced a shift in our perception of objects. Fitzgerald published The Great Gatsby in 1925, during the Roaring Twenties, a period when advertising was growing, mass production made goods available to all, and a new affluence allowed the middle classes to attempt to live the life of the elite. The relationship between subjects and objects was evolving into new forms. Now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the relationship is once again experiencing an evolution. Commodities, including clothing, cars and luxury goods, may be purchased online, without any physical contact between buyer and object until its arrival in a brown package on the doorstep. Perhaps it is this new distance between myself and objects which drew me towards Fitzgerald's world of objects, which expresses the excess of the 1920's as well as his personal view on an object's role in class conflict. In "The Secret Life of Things (Virginia Woolf and the Matter of Modernism)," cultural critic Bill Brown provides insight on the role objects play in any particular culture:

As literary criticism wrestles itself out of the homogenizing habits of new historicism and the heterogenizing habits of cultural studies, one version of a new materialism asks how material culture impresses itself on the literary imagination. Another asks how literature itself works to imagine materiality; how it renders a life of things that is tangential to our narratives of modern production, distribution and consumption; how it can contribute to a materialist phenomenology that does not bracket history, but asks both *how*, in history (how in one cultural formation), human subjects and material objects constitute one another, and what remains

outside the regularities of that constitution that can disrupt the cultural memory of modernity and modernism. If Simmel was right to argue, circa 1900, that the increased access to things that characterizes modernity results in the loss of the thingness of things, then we should recognize how various aesthetic practices work to compensate for that loss. Indeed, it would be perfectly reasonable to account for the recent academic attention to objects (not to say things) as a reaction against the declaration of—if not some compensatory response to the fact of—the further disappearance of the object within an increasingly mediated (indeed digitally mediated) universe (Brown 4).

Like Brown, I am interested in both a materialist and an aesthetic understanding of objects in Fitzgerald's work. And like Brown, I have been trying to break away from new historicism, which depicts all characters as the same, as standardized, as well as cultural studies, which creates too heterogeneous a picture of mass society. As Brown argues in, studying how language depicts the world of objects one must look not only how the post-war affluence influences the production, distribution and consumption of objects, but also at separate influences such as education, memory and class. Fitzgerald's fiction depicts how the economic environment of the 1920's, as well as personal histories, influence consumers' attitudes in his works of fiction. The old money, which the upper class of the 1920's possesses, comes into conflict with newfound wealth of the rising middle classes. In the post-World War I era, the advent of mass production allowed the middle classes access to goods only available, previously, to the leisure class. Fitzgerald's subject, class conflict, is therefore depicted through objects: mobility/

stability, their use in a modernized novel of manners format, and the relationship between possessor and object that is formed through language.

In Chapter 1 “Movement: Leisure Class Dynamism and Class Mobility” I will begin to discuss Fitzgerald’s concept of a “life of things”. I will do so with the help of Thorstein Veblen’s The Theory of the Leisure Class, which describes the leisure class as driven to acquire and showcase objects by the notion of “pecuniary emulation.” In this age, it is objects that are indicative of material wealth and therefore social status. The leisure classes are named as such because of their refusal to participate in any productive labors. They invest all of their time and money in learning and maintaining social codes of conduct. In studying how Fitzgerald depicts houses and automobiles I show two types of mobility, the restless movement of the bored leisure class and the social climbing of members of the middle class. In The Great Gatsby, the house of leisure class Tom and Daisy Buchanan embodies a sense of dynamic movement while the house of Jay Gatsby bears traces of his recent rise to wealth and the social elite.

In Chapter 2, “The Class Coding of Stray Objects: Manners and the Fabrics of Luxury,” I will discuss how social mobility creates a conflict between the classes as evidenced in the snobbery of the leisure class. Fitzgerald depicts this defensive attitude of the upper classes which followed the post-war prosperity in his modernized version of the novel of manners. In this chapter I utilize Lionel Trilling’s “Manners, Morals and the Novel,” from his work The Liberal Imagination to provide a forum to discuss how Fitzgerald’s works compare to a novel of manners form. Here Thorstein Veblen’s concept of “pecuniary emulation” has its equivalent in Trilling’s notion of snobbery. Snobbery is a “pride in status without pride in function,” a crippling force which captures

the social elite of democratic societies such as the United States (Trilling 197). In Chapter 2, I will study how the possessions of the wealthy help to disguise their emotions, and how outsiders unsuccessfully use clothes and other possessions to emulate and infiltrate elite society.

Chapter 3, “Language and Possession” will show how language, speech especially, reveals the conflict discussed in Chapter 2 between the mobility and leisure class mannerisms. In my final chapter, Bill Brown, and his perceptions of the object in literature, help to establish the language’s role in creating a relationship between the subject/possessor and object/possessed. Emphasis will be placed upon the dialogue of the wealthy and how Fitzgerald uses elements of speech to show that members of the leisure class are inherently different from the rest of society. Like objects, outsiders such as Jay Gatsby and Myrtle Wilson covet the speech patterns of the wealthy, in order that they may infiltrate the upper class. Through these individuals’ adaptation of the dialogue of the wealthy, Fitzgerald shows the depth of the class conflict. As well as focusing on this direct connection, I will also show the unique techniques Fitzgerald employs with language, such as framing narrators and color shifts which highlight the writer’s skill at depicting the class conflict through objects and objectification.

## CHAPTER 1

### MOVEMENT: LEISURE CLASS DYNAMISM AND CLASS MOBILITY

In his adolescent and early adult years, the girls of the leisure classes rejected F. Scott Fitzgerald as a “poor boy.” In adulthood he lived beyond his means, abusing alcohol, hoping to become in with the leisure class. All these elements of his life are captured in his short stories and novels in his interactions with objects. In many ways F. Scott Fitzgerald’s fiction seems to fit neatly into Thorstein Veblen’s work, The Theory of the Leisure Class. He identifies the leisure class as those individuals who are born and bred with wealth and all the comforts and luxuries which this position privileges them to. Throughout his life he desires to reach this position monetarily as well as socially. However, as this position is only available by privileged birth and so it is unreachable to him, the perpetual outsider. In his novel, The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald inverts this desire through his narrator Nick Carraway, a leisure class individual whose disapproval of class mobility colors the novel.

Veblen outlined his ideas about values and lifestyles of the leisure classes in chapters such as, “Pecuniary Emulation” and “Conspicuous Consumption”. Veblen begins to describe the development of the leisure classes with a theory of the origins of private property. Private property originated with women who were captured as trophies of the victorious in wartime (Veblen 19). Slavery of other captives soon began to follow. Women, from the beginning have been possessions of their male owners (21). Women, as well as the products of their labors have always been a status symbol for the men who possess them. The more powerful the man, the more wives, or more genteel these wives were. In the development of woman as property lies the roots of the leisure class. In



even the most primitive cultures, Veblen argues, the persons with the most political and intellectual status refrain from participation in physical labor. Throughout history, the most revered and the most learned have relied on others for basic tasks of growing, foraging and cooking food (30).

Both these woman and the class of leisure have evolved in the industrial age. As history moves forward, Veblen argues that “accumulated property more and more replaces trophies of predatory exploit the conventional exponent of prepotence and success”(22). The trophies of war, women and slaves, are in the consumer society replaced by objects, goods that can be bought and sold and therefore measure the socio-economic power of their owner. Here Veblen’s theory of “pecuniary emulation” comes to surface. He states, “the motive that lies at the root of ownerships is emulation”(21). The motive is not comfort, or satisfying boredom of a class which is socially forbidden to work, but to emulate the consumption patterns of one another. The leisure class does not merely refrain from participation in physical labor, but in any action that is productive. Instead the class occupies its time through the consumption of material goods as well as participating in useless endeavors such as learning dead languages, hunting and golfing. Away from the public eye, codes of conduct are developed and carefully maintained. When members of the class are, on occasion, in the public eye they exhibit these carefully played out social codes.

Veblen sees that the woman is the primary showpiece of the leisure class. Once the chief provider for her family in primitive times, she has now been reassigned the role of status symbol (Veblen 63). The less she does, the wealthier the family must be. Here objects begin to play a role. Traditionally the manner of her dress, from her corset to her

high heeled boots, do not allow her to participate in any activities (126). In addition, these restricting elements are constantly changing with the fashions. In Fitzgerald's time the corset and the dangerously high heel have been replaced by more comfortable attire, but conventions such as unmanageably long hair still persist. In addition, with the advent of many mechanical devices that do the duties servants once had to do, domestics' presence in large numbers is no longer a necessity. Therefore the leisure of these "members of households" also measures the social success of the family (49). Though the excess of servants, the new gadgets and the constricting garments can be seen as purely ornamental, Veblen argues that beneath each luxury is buried a "useful purpose"(75). Even objects designed for industrial use, he states, will always have an element of waste tied to them.

By studying how Fitzgerald depicts the houses and automobiles of his characters, I will begin to see how he uses objects in his fiction to both depict and refute Veblen's leisure class values. Fitzgerald uses houses to portray the restlessness of Tom and Daisy, the unease of Nick Carraway, and the challenge of an outsider, Jay Gatsby. The houses described in Fitzgerald's novel The Great Gatsby as well as his short stories convey a sense of place as well as mobility. Veblen, describes a house's mobility in his chapter "Conspicuous Leisure." For Veblen a leisure class individual's house is defined not by the objects, which are placed in this setting, but by the labor, which comes about in its maintenance. The gentlemen who inhabit these houses, he tells us, are not involved in these labors. Instead, it is the duty of the lady of the house and her entourage of servants. Their leisure is "an ostensibly laborious kind. It takes the form, in large measure, of a painstaking attention to the service of the master, or to the maintenance and elaboration

of the household paraphernalia; so that it is leisure only in the sense that little or no productive work is performed by this class” (Veblen 44). Therefore, houses are an indication of the collective “wasted effort” of a specific leisure class family. Houses, though fixed, may give evidence of this behind the scenes movement, social mobility in Gatsby’s case or restlessness in the case of the Buchanan’s house, which seems to defy the pull of the earth.

In his essay “Possessions in the Great Gatsby,” Scott Donaldson remarks that “the single most important object by which to declare one’s status is the house”(12). This being said, the Buchanans, Daisy and Tom have a house that could make any leisure class family proud, yet their lawn, a living organism seems to threaten the illusion of contentment and stability. Daisy and her husband Tom inhabit a home, which exemplifies their leisure class lifestyle, as a part of East Egg, the fashionable part of Long Island where the grandchildren of the Gilded Age reside. As Nick Carraway goes to visit his cousins, the Buchanan’s house at first appears to be any East Eggers palace: “their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial mansion overlooking the bay”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 11). The Buchanan’s house overlooks the ocean, just as Gatsby’s house does. Unlike Gatsby’s house, however, their house is unpretentious. It is classical in style, reminiscent of governmental buildings, reflecting order and balance. This is the sort of residence Nick has come to expect of the members of his own class, reflecting the mannerisms and social codes that the group stands for. Gatsby’s house, in contrast is a sign of all the excess such newly wealthy individuals possess. It is only when Nick notices the unusual lawn that the Buchanan’s house begins to make an impression on him. Past the house he sees “the lawn [that]

started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens—finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 11). Fitzgerald uses motion-based language to describe the landscaping of the Buchanan’s estate. It seems that the lawn has been allowed to run rampant. It is untamed by the structures that have put there by man, the “sun-dials” and “brick walks”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 11). In addition, the lawn interacts with the other plant life in the Buchanan’s yard. It bypasses the “burning gardens” and has united with “the bright vines,” where it has drifted after “its run”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 11). The lawn, paired next to the house, gives a sense of dynamism to the scene. Nothing is ever stable in this house, there is always an air of restless emotion, suggesting travel or inner movement.

The home of the Washington family from Fitzgerald’s short story “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” seems to have a sense of motion which is very similar to that of the Buchanan’s house. The journey itself builds guest John T. Unger’s expectations about the home of his schoolmate, Percy Washington. First Percy and John must take a train to a remote part of Montana, drive in a buggy and then switch to the family “station wagon” before the pair can approach the mysterious abode of the family. Fitzgerald’s complication of the journey builds up expectations about the house which are fueled by Percy’s comment ““that’s nothing at all. My father has a diamond bigger than the Ritz-Carlton Hotel””(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 78). If the family owns a gem bigger than a luxury resort, how large and ostentatious must their house be? The house does not disappoint John’s fantasies: “full in the light of the stars, an exquisite chateau rose from the borders of the lake, climbed in marble radiance half the height of an adjoining

mountain, then melted in grace, in perfect symmetry, in translucent feminine languor, into the massed darkness of a forest of pine”(82). Like the house of the Buchanan’s, it becomes an entity and appears to be in motion. Though the house is literally fixed on a diamond mountain, completely immobile, Fitzgerald uses action verbs to describe the way in which the chateau is built upon the mountain. The chateau is constantly in play with the natural environment around it. The house “[rises]” from the lake, exhibiting the Washington’s power over the natural. Then it “[climbs]” half of the mountain, which allows us to see its extraordinary size. Finally it “melts” into “the massed darkness of a forest of pine,” becoming a part of its natural setting. This suggests that characters such as the Washingtons, whose house takes over nature, and the Buchanan’s, whose lawn seems to defy its borders, have enough money to alter the way in which nature performs. The house provides John with an experience that affects all the senses, as he feels the, “warm enchantment,” hears, “the faint acciaccre sound of violins,” and smells, “the night air...fragrant with a host of flowers”(82). It is as if every element that surrounds the residence of the Washington’s, even nature, is intended to create an atmosphere of perfect calm and pleasantness. In this eerie first encounter with the luxury of the Washington estate, even unaware of his inability to leave it alive, John has no desire to “emulate” their lifestyle. In presenting the reader with an exaggerated description of leisure class lifestyle Fitzgerald is beginning to refute Veblen’s notion of “pecuniary emulation.” The reader understands why John Unger would not want to imitate his friend’s lifestyle. Percy’s family possesses great wealth, however, they do so in total isolation from reality.

The interiors of some of the houses which Fitzgerald describes in his novel and short stories also have elements of physical movement and dynamism. The Buchanan’s

house also reflects a sense of movement and unrest. The windows are open, allowing “a breeze [to] [blow] through the room, [blowing] the curtains in at one end and out the other like flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling—and then [rippling] over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as it as wind does on the sea”( Fitzgerald, Gatsby 12). All objects in the living room are being blown about by the wind and are constantly shifting in their appearance and form. Fitzgerald uses food imagery “the frosted wedding cake of a ceiling” and “wine-colored rug” in describing the furniture of the room. These descriptions indicate both the immediate gratification that comes with eating sweets as well as the pleasures of indulging in the fruits of a long-time labor that occurs in the creation of wine. Daisy, Tom and their set are struggling against these two ends, the conveniences of the new consumer society and the inheritance and status which come from previous generations. Daisy and Tom’s home gives us evidence that they are members of the leisure class. Their obvious inaction and restlessness and their carefully constructed peaceful environment are all the products of sitting idly by day after day. However, this version of leisure class lifestyle seems to contradict Veblen’s who argues that beneath each action of the leisure class is an underlying practicability. The lives of the Buchanans are dynamic and destructive, but not practical. If something is practical, it is boring to them.

The inside of the Washington family’s chateau possesses alluring and disturbing dreamlike qualities. Everything in it is futuristic and unique. While Percy is giving his guest John a tour, “the floor under their feet would flame in brilliant patterns from lighting below,” and “beneath layers of thick crystal he would see blue or green water swirling, inhabited by vivid fish and growths of rainbow foliage”(Fitzgerald, “A

Diamond” 83). The floors patterns are constantly shifting, leaving the impression that the Washington family’s moods are constantly shifting, their attentions brief and easily exhausted. There seems to be no limit to what they attempt to control. With their control they have tried to form a fixed environment that their guests and servants can never leave. They are perpetually trapped in an isolated world, which has everything except for the changes that accompany everyday life. As a result the Washingtons import amusement, in the name of guests, from the outside. When a guest’s visiting time is over they are subsequently murdered in their sleep.

Jay Gatsby’s West Egg mansion also expresses a physical sense of movement, though this is manifested by the human servants and guests, which support and visit it. During the weekends, the mansion is transformed into the leisure class’s personal amusement park by the servants that Gatsby employs. Crates of oranges and lemons are turned into freshly squeezed juice, caterers bring countless varieties of foods, a full orchestra arrives and Gatsby’s gardens are transformed by “several feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby’s enormous garden,” (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 44). Here, Nick records all the behind the scenes efforts of Gatsby’s employees that make his house a constant source of entertainment for the leisure class. These servants, without whom Gatsby would not be able to throw such extravagant parties, participate in Veblen’s “wasted effort”(45). They are constantly setting up and cleaning up after gatherings that will soon be forgotten by Gatsby’s guests. The preparations these servants go through not only alter the house physically, but also shift the colors of things, due to the atmosphere created by the spectacle. Gatsby’s gardens become “blue” and the music that the orchestra plays is “yellow” (44-45). The color blue

is indicative of the melancholy and isolation that Jay Gatsby feels. Yellow, closely related to the gold of coinage, seems to indicate the greed his guests possess. They hope to gain not only monetarily but also socially from Gatsby's famous parties. The natural order of things is being distorted by Gatsby's rise to fortune and relative fame and thus the colors the eye perceives are being warped. The atmosphere of the party separates the owner from his own home.

Nick Carraway's "cardboard bungalow" in The Great Gatsby conveys both a sense of the social mobility around him as well his own unstable and unfixd future. It allows us to see his world-view as well his attitudes towards other characters in the novel. Despite his family's leisure class background "prominent well to do people in this middle-western city for three generations," Nick Carraway, the narrator of the novel, reluctantly lives in a "weather beaten cardboard bungalow at eighty a month"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 8). Nick's house has a lack of stability and permanence, which may be indicative of his financial position. He has no assurance of inheritance from his family and is therefore left on his own. The house is clearly unstable, impermanent and without a certain future, much as Nick the bachelor with no clear career, no marriage in sight and no roots in the East seems to be. The material of the dwelling also strikes the reader. It is made out of cardboard, which is cheap and mass-produced.

Though his family fortunes have dwindled, Nick Carraway maintains an attitude of a person born into leisure class. As I mentioned before, Fitzgerald uses Nick to invert his ambitions about becoming a part of the leisure class. Nick's stable social position allows him to credibly critique such social climbers as Jay Gatsby and Myrtle Wilson as he points out the boundaries that exist, which these individuals are unaware. Nick



Carraway appears to be fine example of Veblen's concept of financially deficient member of the leisure class (58). Such individuals maintain their social status at the risk of losing all remaining capital, continuing to consume objects. However, Nick does not attempt to engage in conspicuous consumption of his cousin Daisy and her husband Tom. Instead, he retreats to the unfashionable West Egg, where new money such as Gatsby's attempts to take root. Rather than condemn his cousin's reckless lifestyle Nick accepts it as natural, it is the way they were meant to be, however, Gatsby does not escape his condemnation.

Nick, in introducing himself to reader, attempts to convey himself as a non-judgmental character. He tells us some advice, which Mr. Carraway attempts to impart to Nick, his son, "“whenever you feel like criticizing anyone...just remember that all people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had””(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 5). This sort of language is common in a family such as Nick's, the social elite, who has been brought up with all the comforts a boy such as James Gatz did not possess. Nick tells us that after World War I, his non-judgmental worldview changes, he only desires order and wants to be free of any connection with, "riotous excursions with the privileged glimpses into the human heart" (6). Therefore he struggles against connecting himself with Gatsby, a man very much unlike his past, "who represent[s] everything for which [he has] an unaffected scorn," a man who demands these "glimpses" of Nick, a man who changes his conceptions (6). Though all of this may eventually occur, from the first, Nick is struck by Gatsby's differences from the men who he grew up with, and the first indication of this is Gatsby's house, which surrounds his bungalow, rented for \$80 a

month. In contrast, Gatsby's house was one of, "two huge places that rented for twelve or fifteen thousand a season" that enclose his small dwelling from both sides (8).

Gatsby's mansion exemplifies a different sense of movement from the Buchanan's dynamism. It is this social mobility in which Nick finds discomfort and immorality. The house is "a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 9). It is ostentatious with every element leading to excess. From the house, it becomes apparent that Jay Gatsby is not a true member of the leisure class. He comes from new money, very recently in fact. Traces of this path are visible in elements of the house's structure. The tower is "spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy," like Gatsby's clothes, manners and lavish parties; his house proclaims his inexperience in the world of leisure class. Because he was not brought up among the leisure class, he lacks the manners and social knowledge, which Veblen states would be inherent to anyone raised in a leisure class family. Gatsby's shortcut to these values comes from imitation of fashions in magazines, and replacing morals with money. Gatsby, and therefore his mansion, possess a sense of class mobility which differs from commanding mobility seen in the houses of the Washingtons and Buchanans. His house reflects his journey to financial success and eventual acceptance by the leisure classes.

Like Gatsby's mansion, Myrtle Wilson's New York apartment possesses contrasting qualities of movement associated with social status as well as a sense of immobility and stasis that is attributed to the futility of her efforts. The apartment is the setting of Myrtle's attempts at what Veblen calls "pecuniary emulation." Her apartment

is first described as the lavender cab bearing Nick, Tom and Myrtle pulls up to “one slice in a long white cake of apartment houses,”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 32). Again, the image of the white cake appears as an indication of the immediate gratification that Myrtle associates with the upper classes whom she emulates. She is aware of the Buchanan’s carefree attitude toward commodities and money in general. Their rapid consumption of both people and objects is similar to the fleeting joy a sweet imparts on the consumer. When Nick enters Myrtle’s living room he is presented with a space that “[is] crowded to the doors with a set of tapestried furniture entirely too large for it so that to move about [is] to stumble continually over scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles”(33). The furniture is bulky, awkward and extravagant much the same way that Myrtle first appears when Nick meets her “a thickish figure” who “[blocks] out the office light”(29). The arrangement of her apartment also serves to represent the gathering she is about to have with her sister Catharine and the McKees. As her apartment is now filled with ridiculously decorated furniture, soon it will become cluttered with annoying, pretentious people. Despite the mass of furniture in the living room, the walls are bare except for one picture of a “hen sitting on a blurred rock” which, as the narrator stares at it “[resolves] itself into a bonnet and countenance of a stout old lady beamed down into the room” (33). Myrtle tries to associate herself with old money and more refined culture, but much of the time she ends up looking ridiculous as she becomes affected.

Although Gatsby’s house bears traces of his recent rise to financial and social success, the structure itself appears motionless. Where the Buchanan’s lawn is constantly moving, their house blowing with a breeze, Gatsby’s house is often described as seeming empty, devoid of any life or movement within. While Daisy and Tom’s house embodies

a sense of leisure class boredom and restlessness, Gatsby's mansion possesses a sense of purposeful motion towards social acceptance. As Nick turns to leave his first party at Gatsby's, he notices that "a sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 60). Though the movement of the party continues around him, Gatsby is separated from the guests who crowd around him by his desires. It is the very social mobility which the house betrays that isolates and immobilizes it from the hordes of partygoers. After Gatsby loses Daisy on the day of the car accident his house becomes even more oppressive. Nick is struck by how hollow the mansion has become, "his house had never seemed so enormous to me as it did that night when we hunted through the great rooms for cigarettes"(154). All of Gatsby's infamous guests have left, his servants do not seem to be present and the space becomes entirely devoid of life save Nick and Gatsby. Not only has the house seem to grow in size, it has become impenetrably dark, a hindrance in the search for cigarettes.

The dynamism of the Washington family's home, which immediately captures John's senses, contrasts with the fixed, immobile lifestyle of the Washingtons. The Washington family is Fitzgerald's exaggerated model for the leisure class. The manner in which the Washington family lives their life, in abundant luxury impressing their guests with their superhuman control of their well ordered world in many ways promotes Thorstein Veblen's, The Theory of the Leisure Class. The family possesses total control over their servants and guests, in a perverse exaggerated form of Veblen's idea of humans as commodities. These individuals are consumed and promptly disposed of when they are no longer needed. However, the Washington family in many ways goes

against the grain of Veblen's arguments about the leisure class. His whole notion of "pecuniary emulation" is undermined by the family's isolation in the Montana mountains. Not only is their vast wealth not on display for those other members of their social class, it has yet to be discovered by any human being who has left the compound alive.

"The Rich Boy" is more conventional study of the effects of leisure class lifestyle on a particular young man, Anson Hunter. The narrator describes how the very rich are in a sense, cursed from the start: "let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you are born rich, it is very difficult to understand,"(Fitzgerald, "Rich" 152). Being rich means living with certain advantages and luxuries which shape the way in which a child grows up and sees the world. The rich child is born possessing everything, thus they come to expect, that without any effort, everything will end up in their favor. As we see, Anson Hunter is a member of Veblen's true leisure class. He is of the second generation wealthy, brought up for a life of leisure that leaves him ill prepared for the world which he is faced with. He becomes engulfed in a cycle of bad choices and inaction.

The house in which Anson Hunter lives plays an integral role in shaping him as "The Rich Boy." As a child Anson Hunter lives in a house on 71<sup>st</sup> Street in New York City during most of the year, and in the summer in "a big estate in northern Connecticut. It was not a fashionable locality—Anson's father wanted to delay as long as possible his children's knowledge of that side of life"(Fitzgerald, "Rich" 153). Of the Gilded Age generation, Mr. Hunter wants to protect his children from the leisure class lifestyle. He

wants his children to have morals and values, not lavish lifestyles. He attempts to maintain these morals by sheltering his offspring from the world in his large house in unfashionable region of the country. The narrator points out that though this desire is admirable, it was impossible “in [the] huge establishments” in which the Hunter family lived (153). The large space alone prevents the necessary parent-child interaction which keeps middle class children aware of reality. Living in a large house, like his estate in Connecticut, gives Anson distinction from those around him, allowing him to form a sense of superiority which when developed early is nearly impossible to break out of.

Myrtle Wilson, as the wife of mechanic George Wilson, lives with her husband over his garage in the valley ashes and keeps an apartment in the city with Tom Buchanan. Her dual residences represent both her fixed social position as a mechanic’s wife, and her desired position as leisure class Mrs. Buchanan. The garage, over which Myrtle lives is briefly described. However it is more important to focus on the setting in which it occurs, the valley of ashes. The whole landscape is barren, without life. Wilson’s garage occupies a row of three shops, one empty and others without a sign of life. Myrtle is living directly on the outskirts of New York City, the leisure class’s playground, and yet she is surrounded instead by “a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where the ashes take the forms of houses”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 27). Ashes, the byproducts of the consumer culture seem to take the shape of everything. The ashes, merely by their presence, seem to suggest death, a final resting place, and the idea of being permanently fixed to one spot. Thus we can see Myrtle’s desperation in her attempt to escape from her middle class existence to the glamorous world of Tom Buchanan.

In addition to depicting the leisure class of America in isolation from any International context, Fitzgerald, influenced by the time he spent living abroad with his wife and daughter, wrote many short stories depicting leisure class Americans living in Europe. In Fitzgerald's story, "Babylon Revisited" Charlie Wales, an American, returns to Paris after many months away to reclaim his daughter from his sister-in-law's family. After the stock market crash, members of his old set have disappeared. As Charlie enters the home of Lincoln and Marion Peters, he notices the atmosphere, "The room was warm and comfortably American. The three children moved intimately about, playing through the yellow oblongs that led to other rooms; the cheer of six o'clock spoke in the eager smacks of the fire and the sounds of French activity in the kitchen"(Fitzgerald, "Babylon" 212). This environment contrasts strongly with the homes of Buchanans, the Hunters or the Washingtons. Unlike these mansions where objects are carefully arranged for visual and social function and guests are reminded of their prescribed roles, in this scene there is a natural quality of life, influenced by middle class European sensibility. Parents watch over their children, who are allowed to roam and interact at their own will. The noises are created by the fire's crackling, the clock's chiming and sounds of cooking in the kitchen, not by orchestra's imported for the event, or mysterious music which appears out of nowhere. Fitzgerald relishes in creating a world, which differs greatly from that of the leisure class.

He continues to explore the theme of American's abroad in another story, "The Swimmers." This story depicts Henry Mason an American man working in Paris and married to a French-woman, Choupette. His home reflects a dichotomy between his American background and its French environment. As he returns from work, we see that

his “home was a fine high-ceiling apartment hewn from the palace of a Renaissance cardinal in the Rue Monsieur—the sort of thing Henry could not have afforded in America. Choupette, with something more than the rigid traditionalism of a French bourgeois taste, had made it beautiful, and moved through gracefully with their children”(Fitzgerald, “Swimmers” 497). In contrast to the Peters’ home, the Mason family apartment is sophisticated, combining the aristocracy of the old world with the style and mannerisms with the new world’s leisure class. The space we see is purely architectural, humans do not leave any evidence of their movements. This structure has been fixed as it was for centuries. The only changes the palace has undergone are the division into apartments and the decorations which Choupette has installed in the home. The movements of the Choupette herself are carefully contemplated, giving the effect of, “mov[ing] through gracefully with their children”(497).

Houses depicted in Fitzgerald’s fiction are always fixed, whether they appear to be so such as Gatsby’s mansion seems stagnant, or seem to be in motion as the Buchanan’s lawn races forward. Cars, by nature, transport their occupants from place to place, changing not only the setting but also often the mood and purpose of character’s actions as well. For Veblen cars are a visible indication of wealth to the outside world. They are a progress report on the success of the family. The number of unnecessary attachments, chauffeurs, extra servants, and the high sheen on the automobile would all attest to how the family was doing in society.

In The Great Gatsby, characters are constantly going on day trips to New York City or driving to visit each other in East or West Egg and doing so by their respective automobiles. Cars, whether seen in a public taxicab or a personal luxury car, set the



scene for these characters. Although the lavender cab Myrtle chooses does not belong to her, it sets the tone for the day that Nick will spend in New York City. Nick accompanies Tom and Myrtle into the city to spend some time at Myrtle's apartment. At the train station, after making several purchases at the drugstore, Myrtle "let[s] four taxi cabs drive away before she select[s] a new one, lavender-colored with gray-upholstery"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 31). The taxi is an unusual color, one that is not mass-produced and is indicative of a personal touch associated with luxury goods. The color is a muted down purple, the color worn by royalty. Therefore, it can be associated with the American aristocracy, the leisure class and Myrtle's desire to become apart of this class.

A similarly brief appearance in the novel is the car Daisy Buchanan has in her childhood home of Louisville. Jordan Baker describes Daisy's first encounter with Jay Gatsby before World War I, Daisy was "dressed in white and had a little white roadster and all day long the telephone rang in her house"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 79). The car's white color seems to indicate virginal purity, however, as a roadster model it is built for motion, speed and excitement. White, always a symbol of innocence, also allows the passenger to constantly be noticed, but in respectable fashion. It is visible from a far distance, unlike a black automobile would be, but unlike the color red, it is not brazen. It therefore suits Daisy's world of contradictions. She is allowed to flirt with the men from Camp Taylor and even go out with them unsupervised, however when she attempts to run to Gatsby she is stopped.

In order to get a better sense of Fitzgerald's development of the idea of the car in motion it is useful to look beyond his works of fiction, to his notebooks. Among his entries there is a description of a young girl driving in her automobile, which mirrors

Daisy Buchanan: “a small car, red in color and slung at that proximity to the ground which indicated both speed of motion and speed of life. It was a Blatz Wildcat.

Occupying it, in the posture of an aloof exhausting exacting by the sloping seat, was a blond, gay, baby-faced girl” (Fitzgerald, Notebooks 224). The description of Daisy’s car has merely become exaggerated. The color has shifted from white to red, making the car more noticeable as well as vanquishing any remaining sense of innocence. This description is without concealment. The color red is flashy, but also vibrant, giving the car and the girl in it more life. The car shows its occupant as full of motion, a bit reckless, only concerned with the present. This description’s sense of movement, of immediacy, appeals to the reader as honest, as quite separated from Veblen’s world of precision and social taboos. It appears that the girl is speeding away from Fitzgerald’s world of fiction, into reality.

Gatsby’s cars are described in the most detail of any in the novel. They serve a practical function of transporting his guests as well as showcasing his wealth. When Gatsby is hosting one of his weekend-long parties, “his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains,”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 42). The Rolls-Royce, thought to be only a luxury item is transformed on weekends into a form of mass-transit for all of the uninvited guests of the Hotel de Ville. The station wagon moves like a faithful dog, shuttling passengers back and forth from the train station. The station wagon, an object of utility and mass-production, here serves to propel Gatsby’s social career by providing convenience to his guests.

Later on Gatsby's "gorgeous car," is described in much more detail (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 68). Gatsby comes to pick Nick in his Rolls-Royce in order to bring him to lunch, asking him if had ever seen it:

Everybody had seen it. I was a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hatboxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns. Sitting down behind many layers of glass in a sort of green leather conservatory we started to town (68).

Gatsby's car is "triumphant" like himself showing its beauty and success without apologies. The car, equipped with all sorts of appendages "hatboxes" and "windshields that mirrored a dozen suns" which would seem to impede its progress forward. However, it manages a dignified, if not graceful movement "lurch[ing] up the rocky drive" to Nick's house. The car magnifies the brilliance of the sunlight of the scene, altering the environment outside as well as inside as Gatsby and Nick drive to New York city. Gatsby's automobile seems to fit in perfectly with the Veblen's model for "conspicuous consumption." The numerous appendages are indications of unnecessary convenience, which the leisure class wants to advertise. On their trip into the city, Gatsby and Nick have no need for "hatboxes and supper-boxes," however their presence on Gatsby's car suggests his is financially and socially capable of being ready for anything. The car's body, metal attachments and windshield's have also obviously been polished and cleaned very thoroughly, thus showing Gatsby's superior and superfluous staff who take the time to make it so.

As in The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald's descriptions of cars in "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," are indicative of character of a class. In this case, the Washingtons' car, accurately describes the family and their attitudes. After leaving the buggy that met them at the train, Percy and John step into a chauffeured car. The car is "larger and more magnificent than any [John] had ever seen. Its body was of gleaming metal richer than nickel and lighter than silver, the hubs of the wheels were studded with iridescent geometric figures of green and yellow—John did not dare to guess whether they were glass or jewel"(Fitzgerald, "The Diamond" 79). The car seems to be made up of a rare type of metal. Percy's attitude towards the automobile is interesting to note as well. John remarks at how unique and amazing this car is after stepping inside and seeing the amazing upholstery. Percy responds, "“why, it's just an old junk we use for a station wagon”"(79). The Washington family, Percy included, are carefree in their regard for the objects, which they possess. Like the metal that makes up their car, they are changelings: a family who seems most welcoming and hospitable, but in reality only care to amuse themselves with outsiders for a time.

Like the members of the leisure class that Veblen describes in The Theory of the Leisure Class, Fitzgerald's upper class figures regard persons new to their world much as they do objects: disposable and easily replaceable. The values Fitzgerald applies to their automobile--more expensive than any that could ever be created—represent how they construct their own world: sleek, malleable, with every luxury at their fingertips: but also incalculable to the outsider who would emulate it. The Washingtons' car, not unlike Jay Gatsby's has more luxuries on its exterior and interior than the reader has ever seen before; but unlike Gatsby's it has not be acquired as an indication of "conspicuous

consumption.” To Percy and his family, such qualities are in their everyday experience and so remain ordinary even dull—a wall of presumption that keeps the outsider, frozen by his awe, always beyond the perimeter. Compared to the general public, to whom their habits and lifestyle are completely foreign or a curiosity, the leisure class “owns” with sheer ease.

## CHAPTER 2 THE CLASS CODING OF STRAY OBJECTS: MANNERS AND THE FABRICS OF LUXURY

In Chapter 1 I introduced two different types of mobility found in the houses and cars of F. Scott Fitzgerald's characters, a restless movement of the leisure class and an upward mobility of the middle class "outsiders." This chapter will concern itself with how class mobility creates a conflict between the leisure class and the rising middle class, as evidenced in Lionel Trilling's notion of snobbery. Through Trilling I am able to explore the novel of manners and its effects on Fitzgerald's fiction. In Trilling's The Liberal Imagination, in the chapter entitled "Manners, Morals and the Novel," he examines the development of the novel with respect to society. The novel, he says emerges in importance with the "appearance of money as a social element"(Trilling 197). In other words, the novel responds to what he defines as snobbery:

pride in status without pride in function. And it is an uneasy pride of status. It always asks, "Do I belong—do I really belong? And does he belong? And if I am observed talking to him will it make me seem to belong or not to belong?" It is the peculiar vice not of aristocratic societies which have their own appropriate vices, but of bourgeois democratic societies...The dominant emotions of snobbery are uneasiness, self consciousness, self-defensiveness, and the sense that one is not quite real but can in some way acquire reality (197)

Snobbery, Trilling advocates is an ill of our society, and he presents us here with its symptoms. In democratic cultures where money becomes the dominant indicator of status, one's possessions become an immediate sign of status. Thus we see that Thorstein Veblen's idea of "pecuniary emulation" discussed in Chapter 1, is echoed in Trilling's

notion of snobbery. The lower and middle classes, instead of being content with well made objects that are indicative of their status, would rather settle for, “articles [that] appear as the articles of the very wealthy,” no matter how crudely made and mass-produced they may be (Trilling 198). This feeling of constant insecurity that accompanies snobbery feeds a desire for objects which reflect one’s financial success and social status. Obtaining of these objects, this form of Veblen’s “pecuniary emulation” leads to Trilling’s idea that “one is not quite real but can in some way acquire reality”(197). Here we begin to see a difference between Veblen, who’s influence on Fitzgerald we examined in Chapter 1, and Trilling, whose ideas will provide a framework for this chapter. Trilling’s specialty is the Novel of Manners. He studies how clothes and other possessions affect character’s positions in society. He also looks at their mannerisms and grooming habits and their effect upon the social environment.

The novelist’s occupation is to provide a lens with which the reader can examine the society in question. Thus we are examining Fitzgerald’s fiction in terms of the novel of manners. A novel of manners is defined as a realistic novel that “focuses on customs, conversation, and ways of thinking and valuing of a particular social class” (Abrams, 192). Every small action, every mannerism, is recorded through the novelist’s discerning eye to be interpreted by readers of his generation and those which come afterwards. While European writers are comfortable critiquing their societies in their novels, Americans, Trilling argues, seem hesitant to closely examine their society. Americans, he tells us, “believe that to touch accurately on the matter of class, to take full not of snobbery, is somehow to demean themselves”(Trilling 201). They are afraid that by writing about the inner workings of their society’s snobbery they will become

contaminated and will be cast out. Writers, he argues, should expose the rich in their realities. Fitzgerald is capable of looking beyond these fears of social rejection. He, like Trilling, is anxious to carefully study America's social elite. Trilling points this out the famous conversation Fitzgerald had with Hemingway in which he exclaims, "The very rich are different from us," and Hemingway refutes him, "Yes, they have more money"(Trilling 201). Unlike many critics who have sided with Hemingway, Trilling sees the validity of Fitzgerald's point. The rich, born in a different atmosphere than the average citizen, develop a different sense of morals and worldviews.

The novel of manners was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to study the details of this class, to whom ritual and taboos are not only relevant, they are essential. It would seem that in the post World War I era, with the rise of mass production, national advertising, and the diffusion of affluence, older aristocratic codes of manners might have disappeared. However, in studying Fitzgerald's fiction with relation to the writings of Lionel Trilling, an interesting paradox becomes evident. Fitzgerald shows us a society that has various class codes, which in his world of emerging mass production are becoming more mobile. In other words, new affluence allows the middle classes to emulate the fashionable, and make their difference from the elites disappear. However, the leisure class, those families with "old money" become defensive and reestablish these manners, class coding and boundaries becoming more important than before. In the spirit of Trilling I will examine how the Fitzgerald's characters' interactions with stray objects reveal their class positions. Those in the social elite, like Tom Buchanan, attempt to conceal their brutal personalities with a thin covering of clothing. While those engaged in social climbing, such as Myrtle Wilson, use objects to mask their origins. Through a close study of these



objects we are able to look deeper into the characters that we began to glance at in the first chapter, as well as examine more closely Fitzgerald's preoccupation with objects.

In describing the clothes that his characters wear, Fitzgerald begins to delve into their personalities. Tom Buchanan, who appears as Gatsby's nemesis, is first described through Nick's eyes when he goes to visit Daisy and Tom at their new house in East Egg. Tom, just coming in from outdoors, is seen in his riding clothes. Nick immediately notes that his once college classmate has hardened so that "not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body—he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 11). Tom, in the encasement of the leisure culture, even in his riding clothes, does not appear content or relaxed. This description both allows the reader to see Tom's physical strength and cruel nature, while at the same time creating curiosity about his character. As Trilling would see it, Tom Buchanan becomes a "type" rather than an individual. Through his study of Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Fitzgerald is allowing the reader to become intimate with the American leisure class with all its glamour and vices. Though well trained in aristocratic values and practices with which he was brought up, Tom's personality, which is harsh and careless, cannot be concealed by his outward appearance, which seems to follow society's guidelines. Tom marries a member of his class, has a child, hosts dinner parties, plays polo and reads scientific journals, and in so doing has fulfilled his duties as a leisure class male. However, he constantly has affairs, in Santa Barbara, Chicago and New York, and cannot seem to contain a certain aggressive quality, which Nick immediately perceives.

While Tom effortlessly maintains his duties as host and husband, his whole being is straining against the social conventions to which he is accustomed.

In the short story “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” Fitzgerald depicts the Washingtons, a family with an exaggerated form of snobbery that does not allow them to interact with anyone but themselves. Out of necessity and by choice, their money isolates them from the rest of the world, so that they become a nation in themselves. The abundance of gems and jewels that the Washingtons possess is instructive of their casual attitudes towards both material and non-material objects. John Unger is quite accustomed to associating with the wealthy of the nation, and he cannot believe Percy when he tells him that his father is the richest man in the world. John then resorts to bragging about the incredible jewels, which he has seen at the houses of America’s elite: “Vivian Schlitzner-Murphy had rubies as big as hen’s eggs, and sapphires that were like globes with lights inside them”(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 77). At first the size and luminescence of these jewels make them appear to be extremely rare, like those once reserved only for royalty. The stature of these gems and their owner shifts abruptly when Percy remarks, “I’ve got quite a collection myself. I used to collect them instead of stamps”(77). In a matter of moments, what was once a symbol of the Schlitzner-Murphy’s wealth and power has been reduced to a curiosity that is studied and catalogued by a child. In much the same way that a child grows out of collecting stamps, rocks or baseball cards, Percy no longer has any use for such childish things as gems. John, already disbelieving, will be astounded at Percy’s next revelation, “that’s nothing at all. My father has a diamond bigger than the Ritz-Carlton Hotel”(78). Jewels are no longer a symbol of wealth for the Washington family, whose daughters adorn their hair with

sapphires and whose chateau rests upon a diamond mountain. They possess more diamonds than have been discovered in the rest of the world. The attitude that the Washingtons have about their jewels carries over into each object they possess. It is through their treatment of such valuable goods as diamonds and other gems that we are able to see Fitzgerald's parody of the leisure class.

Color is a very important element in Fitzgerald's narratives. In The Great Gatsby, he manipulates the color of Gatsby's lawn, turning it blue, emphasizing Gatsby's inner emptiness. Throughout his fiction we see that Fitzgerald always color-codes his objects with multivalent meanings that suggest both their luxury and their contradictions. In clothing especially, color reveals personalities and social status. White is a color worn specifically by the upper classes, as an indicator of Trilling's notion of snobbery. By attiring Daisy Buchanan and the Washington children in white alone, Fitzgerald is performing his duty as novelist in analyzing snobbery. He is, as Trilling describes "[recording] the illusion that snobbery generates and [trying] to penetrate the truth which, as the novel assumes, lies hidden"(198). Fitzgerald explores the meanings of the color white by clothing his young characters in the color. By wearing white, Daisy, Kismine and Percy are asserting themselves as members of the upper classes. Clothing of this sort, would as Veblen writes in his The Theory of the Leisure Class, show that the owner did not participate in extensive laboring and in fact had no contact with dirt (126). White indicates preservation of their physical cleanliness and of their innocence. Fitzgerald also delves deeper into the significance of these characters, none of whom are innocent, wearing the color white.

Daisy Buchanan is commonly seen in a white dress, which seems to define her as both virginal and innocent and contrast with our knowledge of her reckless behavior. Fitzgerald never takes the care to describe her dress in detail. However, she is almost always wearing white. When the reader first sees her she and Jordan are seated on a couch: “they were both in white and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 12). Daisy, in white, is wearing the color seen as most appropriate by her culture and society for summer. She and Jordan reclining together on a couch in white, appear as Ancient Greek goddesses. She is privileged and carefree, unaware of the consequences of her actions. Jordan later describes how on Gatsby’s first encounter with Daisy she was “dressed in white and [had] a little white roadster” (79). Here Fitzgerald is manipulating the image of grace and purity associated with the color white. Though dressed in white Daisy is able to handle the speed and recklessness of a sports car.

Fitzgerald describes Kismine Washington in, “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz,” in much the same way. Both she and Daisy possess a quality of harmful innocence that men find so attractive. Wandering around the property John sees her “dressed in a white little gown that came just below her knees, and a wreath of mignonettes clasped with blue slices of sapphire bound up in her hair. Her pink bare feet scattered the dew before them as she came”(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 90). The use of the adjective “little” suggests that Kismine is still dressed in the clothes of a child and the suggestion of “pink” reminds us of her femininity (90). As a female child, she would as a rule, be even more sheltered from the evils of the world. Kismine is restricted from participating in reality. She appears to be like an Ancient Greek goddess, enthroned on her own Mt. Olympus.

However, the picture of natural innocence is shattered by the image of “blue slices of sapphire” which are in her hair (90). Gems are procured by wealth and wealth, in Fitzgerald, originates from deception and other types of unthinkable corruption. Even Kismine is aware of the practice which her family commits every year, of “sacrificing” their guests before they depart.

Percy Washington is also attired in white. On John’s first morning at the chateau, after bathing and dressing, he enters the dining room to find “Percy, gorgeous in white knickerbockers, smoking in an easy chair”(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 86). Here Fitzgerald contrasts two images, the whiteness of Percy’s clothing which makes him appear innocent and pure, with the action he is involved with, smoking. White is a color worn by children and young people in the upper classes, suggesting a prolonged innocence resulting from being sheltered from the world. In Fitzgerald’s works, however, it also suggests an ease of mind, which comes with the ignorance that is one consequence of the leisure class lifestyle. Smoking suggests sophistication; it is an act committed by someone older and corrupted. Thus we see Percy’s two sides, he is ignorant of the harsh realities of the world as a sheltered upper class boy would be. However, at the same time he has been corrupted by his family’s practices. By using fellow humans as slaves or amusement makers, Percy’s family is discounting the value of human life. It is, in fact, through their sheltered lifestyle that the Washingtons have become even more corrupt, as their values become even more warped and their children have even less of a sense of proper relationships to objects and other people.

Unlike the Washington family, cousin Bernice in Fitzgerald’s “Bernice Bobs her Hair” has a strong sense of morals. However, this sense of right and wrong proves

crippling in the social setting which she finds herself while visiting her cousin Marjorie. Completely ignored or barely tolerated by the young men at the country club, Bernice surely feels Trilling's sense of insecurity so acutely that she sees herself as not actually "real"(197). The story is instructive in how dress and careful grooming can add the necessary confidence that will allow a socially awkward girl to receive male attention in society. Through Bernice's transformation she, in a sense, becomes real to the society in which she finds herself. Bernice's cousin Marjorie decides to help advise Bernice on her appearance and social conduct. Marjorie possesses the very sort of snobbery which Trilling describes as "pride in status without pride in function,"(197). Fitzgerald presents Marjorie as completely without merits except for those mannerisms which are a necessary part of her society. Bernice, by way of contrast, is completely unaware of such social knowledge, and must be given to her tutelage. Marjorie, the ideal heroine of the novel of manners, is very critical of her cousin's naiveté: "first you have no ease of manner. Why? Because you're never sure about your personal appearance. When a girl feels that she's perfectly groomed and dressed she can forget that part of her. That's charm"(Fitzgerald, "Bernice" 35). When all elements of a woman's physical appearance are carefully calculated--an elegant evening dress, carefully groomed eyebrows, practiced grace and careful dancing--she can effortlessly roam about a social setting attracting men doing as she pleases. Bernice has always noticed her cousin's confidence, but thought that she "despised little dainty feminine things"(Fitzgerald, "Bernice" 35). Marjorie tells her that though she despises talking about such things in public, in private such upkeep is necessary. It allows a woman freedom to emasculate themselves by talking about politics or athletics.

After Bernice has been transformed both physically as well as socially by her cousin Marjorie she wins the approval of men in the social circle by asking their advice on whether she should bob her hair. This unconventional practice, a trend among younger people, allows Bernice to appear somewhat daring in conversation. She is also careful to make Charley Paulson, a “sad old bird,” feel flattered, “she added that wanted to ask his advice, because she had heard he was so critical of girls”(Fitzgerald, “Bernice” 37). Oh course Charley is completely ignorant when it comes to women, but through this technique she is able to make him believe that he is in confidence with her and that his opinion really matters. This encounter is enough to lead Bernice on the path to social acceptance as others overhear her conversation. They become intrigued and begin to cut in on her. Bernice tells the men of her scheme to “[go] down to the Sevier Hotel barber-shop, sit in the first chair, and get [her] hair bobbed”(37). This statement is not a true plan for future grooming, but it is merely a promotional scheme, a false advertisement designed by Marjorie to elevate Bernice’s social status. Marjorie, appearing to help Bernice out of charity, is actually manipulating her to fulfill her own goals. After Bernice’s popularity has grown all the men tease her about the hair bobbing and Marjorie remarks, “that’s only a bluff of hers. I should think you’d realized”(41). In exposing her own scheme, Marjorie is threatening the thin thread of popularity to which her cousin clings. Bernice is trapped, if she hesitates and refuses to bob her hair Marjorie has successfully undermined her. Hoping to prove Marjorie and all her friends wrong, Bernice decides to get her hair bobbed.

It is Bernice’s complete lack of social knowledge that causes her downfall. She misunderstands the taboos of the society which allows for talk of daring things, but not

the execution of such plans. The act of bobbing her hair is quite different from talking about it as Bernice quickly finds. While she brags about her daring, men are impressed by her spirit of rebelliousness, however after her hair has actually been bobbed they all feel a sense of morality, pity and disgust which forever separates her from them. Bernice herself recognizes the moment she sees herself in the mirror: “she flinched at the full extent of the damage that had been wrought. Her hair was not curly, and now it lay in lank lifeless blocks on both sides of her suddenly pale face. It was ugly as sin—she had know it would be...her face’s chief charm had been a Madonna-like simplicity” (Fitzgerald, “Bernice” 43). Her hair, once her prize has been downgraded to “lifeless blocks” that have no shape or bounce to them at all. Her hair seems to press her face and make her appear sickly instead of imparting a new radiance, which the reader had hoped for. Bernice herself knew that the outcome of such a haircut could not be favorable, but she felt she had no alternative. If she backed down she would have lost as much social favor as she did when her hair was cut. The act of bobbing Bernice’s hair becomes metaphor for the whole of her social transformation and manipulation by her cousin. It is the commodification of her Bernice’s hair which disgusts her potential suitors. She has become socially contaminated. Immediately upon having her hair cut, she sees the reactions of the men around her who are shocked that she has actually gone through with the act and who pity her loss of beauty. They feel completely alienated from her. This is one example of how Fitzgerald shows a newfound emphasis on class coding and mannerisms. For all Marjorie’s insistence that their generation is different from their mothers’ who read Little Women, social taboos such as short hair on a woman still exist.



Like Gatsby and Myrtle, to be discussed in the following paragraphs, Bernice has misinterpreted the boundaries of her society.

Fitzgerald presents us with an interaction between commodity and snobbery in his novel The Great Gatsby. Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby are both outsiders to Trilling's notion of snobbery. They each have humble backgrounds from which they desire to escape in order to impress and capture their lovers, Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Their social status puts them in a very unique position, as they interact with world of commodity and the world of snobbery found in East Egg. Through his exploration of the rising classes, Fitzgerald touches on a very personal area. Like Myrtle and Gatsby, Fitzgerald has had the desire to become a part of the leisure class his whole life.

Myrtle Wilson's clothes undergo a change as she moves from the valley of ashes to New York city. Nick and Tom Buchanan break up their journey to New York City by stopping in the valley of ashes at Wilson's garage. As the men discuss a business deal, Mr. Wilson's purchase of the Buchanan automobile, Myrtle comes downstairs. It is through her manner of dress that Fitzgerald presents her to the reader for the first time. Her dress brings out her features, "her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crepe-de-chine, contained no facet or gleam of beauty but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 30). Myrtle's dress frames her face, showing the fire of her personality. However, Fitzgerald does not use the blue color of the dress to bring out her eye color or allow the fabric to accentuate her feminine figure. Instead, the dress emphasizes an inner beauty that Myrtle possesses that allows her to sensually carry the extra weight on her figure. The absence of descriptive details about Myrtle only add to her mystery and

therefore her sexual appeal. In this scene Myrtle represents Tom's forbidden fruit as she participates in the domestic scene with her husband.

In a period of transition, the train-ride into the city, Myrtle's personality and thus her clothing changes. Myrtle is in a cocoon-like state as she attempts to discard her middle class tendencies in favor of upper class mannerisms. When Myrtle meets Nick and Tom in the city she no longer is forced to play the role of dutiful wife as she sleeps with Tom. Instead, she can begin to enact her fantasy life. She appears in a "dress [of] brown figured muslin which stretched tight over her rather wide hips"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 31). Here Fitzgerald has begun to describe Myrtle's figure in more detail. Her dress pulls on her hips, accentuating her larger figure rather than hiding it. The brown color is meant to downplay her role, make her less noticeable, in the instance that someone would see her with Tom. Fitzgerald uses this description of her appearance to explain Myrtle's position in Tom's world. Her clothes, manners and characteristics do not conceal her class origins, but instead they exaggerate them. Myrtle believes she is in command of her city life, and therefore Tom's life. The following paragraph in the novel is concerned with Myrtle's actions, from buying magazines and sundries to choosing and waving down the cab that the party will take to the apartment. It is in this paragraph we see Myrtle's misconceptions about the world the Buchanan's inhabit. This misunderstanding is evidenced in Myrtle's purchases, "at the news-stand she bough a copy of "Town Tattle" and a moving picture magazine and, in the station drug store, some cold cream and a small flask of perfume,"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 31). Myrtle purchases magazines to gain knowledge of the commodities and luxury goods that the leisure class possesses. She then immediately acts upon her knowledge by purchasing the various mass-produced

products purchased as used by the upper classes in magazines. She assumes that by buying these convenient commodities in imitation of the lifestyle she supposes Daisy to have that she will become her equivalent. Thus Myrtle provides a good example of what Trilling observed was occurring in the middle classes. Instead of making or purchasing useful middle-class items, she buys only those objects which are crude imitations of objects that the upper classes use (Trilling, 198). She buys what we can only assume is generic cold cream as well as a crudely described “flask of perfume,” obviously not connected with the leisure classes (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 31). Even the magazines that she purchases to discover the latest fashions are a watered down substitute for the real thing, being apart of the social circle in which Tom circulates and attending the parties that the gossip paper describes.

As Myrtle continues to settle into her role as Tom’s mistress she alters her costume for a third and final time. Myrtle’s guests, her sister Catherine and the McKees, arrive and she appears “attired in an elaborate afternoon dress of cream colored chiffon which gave out a continual rustle as she swept about the room. With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur”(35). The language that Fitzgerald uses here to begin the description “attired in an elaborate afternoon dress” is much like that used in the writing of a society column, which Myrtle may have read and copied. She has purchased a ready-made dress, which imitates the dresses made to order by society-women, inferior in quality, but representative of something higher (Trilling 198). The moment she steps into her new costume, Myrtle takes on the qualities that she believes a society woman possesses. The dress allows her to engage in an elaborate

theatrical performance in which she is the star. She exclaims, “my dear” frequently as she laments about how the lower classes who provide services to her are out to get her, desperately trying to show her superiority over them.

Jay Gatsby’s clothes, like his house and his cars, are a means for drawing attention to himself and asserting his status as one of the wealthy. When Gatsby arrives at Nick’s house to meet Daisy he wears “a white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold colored tie” (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 89). Gatsby is wearing white, which he associates with Daisy and her innocence. This is ironic since neither Daisy or Gatsby is innocent. Daisy, who has married another man and lives a reckless life is certainly not innocent, and neither is Gatsby, who in order to achieve a monetary status in line with the Buchanans, finds himself doing shady business deals with Meyer Wolfshiem. Gatsby also wears silver and gold, these colors are symbolic of money’s important presence in American social status. He is hoping to establish his economic security to Daisy, asserting that he has a fortune, which equals if not surpasses her husband Tom’s. However, by wearing such gaudy colors, Gatsby is proclaiming his wealth a bit too loudly. His is not the tasteful display of born wealthy, but the forceful declaration of an outsider. Tom, in effort to break up Daisy and Gatsby’s affair, does some research into Gatsby’s past. Jordan, believing Gatsby to be truthful asserts that Gatsby did go to Oxford. Tom replies, “‘An Oxford man!’ He was incredulous. ‘Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit’”(129). Tom argues that any man who wears a ridiculous color such as pink is obviously trying too hard. This type of dress is indicative of class change and uncertainty about social rules.

Tom does not have to worry, however, for it is the sheer quantity of Gatsby’s clothes which overwhelm Daisy. Daisy, in her tour of Gatsby’s house, comes upon his

wardrobe and encounters the massive amount of clothing which Gatsby possesses. Gatsby is not personally connected to his clothes because he does not hand select his apparel but instead, as he tells Daisy, “I’ve got a man in England who buys me clothes. He sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season, spring and fall” (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 97). Gatsby relies upon social conventions and experts to choose for him what is considered appropriate in manner of dress. He intends to impress Daisy with his collection of fine attire, but his show backfires. He brings out “shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple green and lavender and faint orange with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly with a strained sound Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily”(97). Gatsby possesses shirts of all colors, fabrics and textures and as Daisy feels the materials with her fingers and sees all the bright colors with her eyes she becomes completely overwhelmed. It becomes apparent that Gatsby has crossed the line of snobbery into commodification. Like everything that Gatsby has done to impress society and Daisy he has gone overboard. The sheer quantity of shirts, and his disconnection from them--the shirts are bought for him by another man and not specially made for him--both suggest that they are merely commodities, which Gatsby employs to show his superiority. He wants to show Daisy that he has more shirts than Tom or any other man around him does. Instead of carefully choosing fabrics and cuts which would suit him best, he buys up what is “in style.” He will go to great lengths to look like the society men who he admires, even wearing a pink suit or purchasing clothing in bulk in order to show the simple power of his money. He wants to assert that he is finally able to provide Daisy with what she has grown up with and even more. As Daisy touches his

shirts she has an inclination of the extent of his sacrifice and she becomes scared and uncomfortable.

Gatsby asserts his wealth not only through his own clothes but in providing attire for his servants and guests. Nick tells us that he is one of the few, if the only guest to be invited to Gatsby's party, "a chauffeur in a uniform of robin's egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer—the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his 'little party' that night" (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 45). Because Nick has not yet met the famed Mr. Gatsby, the chauffeur is not merely a messenger for Gatsby, he is an extension of him. The bright blue color of his uniform contrasts with the conventional black color worn by most chauffeurs. Through this we come to understand that Gatsby wants to be noticed by his neighbors and by East Egg society in general. However, in altering the social conventions, he may be going too far if he wants to blend in with the East Eggers of which Daisy is apart. During Gatsby's party, one of his guests tells how after her dress was ruined at a previous party, "he asked me my name and address—inside of a week I got a package from Croirier's with a new evening gown in it"(49). This gesture shows Gatsby's care, his desire to make sure that nothing went wrong at one of his parties. Gatsby's attention to detail makes it obvious to his guests that he is an outsider who is attempting to become apart of their society.

Like the society in Gatsby, Choupette Marston, in Fitzgerald's story, "Swimmers," questions the motives and practices of a girl on the beach, "'but that young lady may be a stenographer and yet be compelled to warp herself, dressing and acting as if she had all the money in the world'"(499). This woman's mannerisms indicate that she

may be of the American upper classes, however, as Choupette says she could be merely posing as such. The French, however, are aware of their class and dress and act accordingly. Therefore we see that Trilling's model, a class system driven by money and the objects that it can purchase, is uniquely American (Trilling 197). Americans purchase objects that imitate those which the social elite possess, adopting the mannerisms of the class above themselves, knowing that a change in class is within their reach. In contrast, Choupette's countrymen do not believe in doing these things. She tells her husband Henry, "I have certain things I wouldn't do because they wouldn't please my class, my family" (Fitzgerald, "Swimmers" 498). The French are content to live by the old world model which Trilling discusses. Peasants and the middle class are content with handmade functional objects which indicate their social position (Trilling 198).

In his story "The Hotel Child" Fitzgerald compares the European upper classes with the American leisure class, a theme that he uses in much of his short fiction. Fifi Schwartz, an American, and her family stand out against the mostly Europeans at their hotel. In terms of the male sex their attentions are favorable as Fifi is constantly chased by a large group of young men who flirt with her, kiss her and try to ask for her hand in marriage. The European women, however are quite put off by her clothing in particular. They are shocked by her ostentatious dress, which proclaims her family's wealth and position in a much louder fashion than they are used to. In a conversation, a fellow hotel guest, an Englishwoman, says, "naturally. I merely said that I consider it rotten taste to dress elaborately, save in the houses of one's friends" (Fitzgerald, "Hotel" 609). Americans see no wrong in displaying their wealth in all environments even amongst strangers on vacation, whereas the Europeans are not accustomed to such behavior. The

clothes that Miss Schwartz wears with such confidence alarm them in part because of the quality of the fabrics and the design, but mostly because of her attitude while wearing them. In a primary description of Fifi, Fitzgerald shows us that “her body was so assertively adequate that one cynic had been heard to remark that she always looked as if she had nothing on underneath her dresses”(599). Her clothes become such a part of her personality such that her inner confidence comes through. It is this quality, emphasized by her manner of dress that irks the European women. The way in which she attires herself on her birthday “in dazzling black, with long white gloves” transforms her from a young-woman of barely eighteen to “a woman of thirty”(599). Fifi is able to transform herself depending on which designer or color her mood requires. The other women are wary of this changeling quality which they associate with the social classes in America.

It is not dress, but absence of clothes, which connect this passage to a similar one in Fitzgerald’s story “Swimmers.” In “Swimmers” the characters shed their clothing and bear only their skin as they interact with the beach and the ocean. Choupette Marston, a native Frenchwoman, comments on the American girls who she sees on the beach while vacationing with her family. The act of sun-tanning is vulgar to her, ““is it lovely? Skin that will be leather at thirty—a sort of brown veil to hide all the blemishes, so that that everyone will look alike. And woman of a hundred kilos in such bathing suits! Weren’t clothes intended to hide Nature’s mistakes””(Fitzgerald, “Swimmers” 498). Choupette, it seems, is repulsed by the very presence of unclothed skin. All the American girls are scantily clad in revealing bathing costumes, which leave very little to the imagination. These swimsuits reveal overweight as well as fit bodies, showing too much of nature to be seemly. Of the old world, Choupette maintains old values. Instead of tanning in a



swimsuit, she reclines in the shade, fully clothed under a “parasol to shelter her peach-bloom skin from the sun”(498). Dark skin was once an indicator of work in the fields and the lower classes. However, the old values have changed now that the urban lower classes are condemned to factory work and are paler than the upper classes. Sun is now an indication of leisure. Revealing bathing suits show too much of the skin, while, unlike in much of Fitzgerald’s descriptions, not indicating any sense of personality except for adventurous spirit or disregard for social mores. The leathery quality of the tanned skin conceals all vestige of individuality as well.

When Henry Marston enters the ocean for the first time he almost drowns. His body, his very skin, must become acclimated with being encompassed in water. Eventually, it is the ocean in particular that allows Henry to transcend his everyday problems, reevaluate his life and make decisions to change. Henry arrives with his family at St. Jean, unable to swim until a young American girl teaches him. At first, he finds the environment of the water not only foreign but also displeasureable, “he floundered in the water. It went into his nose and started a raw stinging; it blinded him; it lingered afterward in his ears; rattling back and forth like pebbles for hours”(Fitzgerald, “Swimmers” 500). Henry, unable to swim or navigate the complex pattern of the ocean’s currents and waves finds himself being assaulted by the elements. His mind, as well as his body, resists acclamation to the ocean and the activity of swimming. It is this panic caused by the invasion of the water into his orifices that makes Henry almost drown the first time he plunges into the ocean hoping to save the American girl. Over time Henry becomes more and more relaxed in the water as his skill increases. After asking the American girl why she loves to swim so much, she replies, “it feels clean in the

sea”(501). He realizes the act of learning how to swim has made him feel different, more adventurous like this girl. By learning how to swim, to interact with the ocean, he has come to terms with a set of values that opposes Choupette and her French-ness. He decides he must return to America.

Three years later he allows the water to help him make yet another life change. Ever since learning to swim his vacations have been family trips to the ocean, “for three years, swimming had been a sort of refuge, and he turned to it as one music or another to drink”(Fitzgerald, “Swimmers” 505). Swimming is an escape from the mannerisms, which he has conditioned himself to growing up in Virginia and living with his French wife and children in Paris. It is important to note that Choupette is resistant to Henry’s learning to swim from the first, being morally opposed to American vacationers who come to France to swim, ““they push water...then they go elsewhere and push other water. They pass months in France and they couldn’t tell you the name of the President. They are parasites such as Europe has not known in a hundred years””(499). The very act of swimming is barbaric to her, typical of Americans who come to the resort to swim, completely ignoring the culture of the locality which they are visiting, so immersed in the pleasure of the water.

These pleasure-centered Americans that Choupette detests so much embody Trilling’s concept of snobbery “pride in status without pride in function” (197). In Europe the class system has been rigidly fixed for generations with the upper classes established by age-old aristocracy. In contrast, American society, in its relative youth, allows for more class shifts. Through Veblen’s notion of “pecuniary emulation” wealthy American families declare their wealth through the objects which they possess. While

Veblen emphasizes the importance of possessions alone, Trilling focuses on the manner by which these objects are used within a structure of class coding.

### CHAPTER 3 LANGUAGE AND POSSESSION

The role of language in the world of objects may at first seem hard to pinpoint. So much of what I have discussed so far has concerned the material, the tangible commodities and possessions, which one can see, hear, taste, touch and smell. However, language, dialogue especially, also expresses the conflict between the two classes, the leisure class and a rising middle class that I have developed in my two previous chapters. Language allows the reader to differentiate between the outsider and those born wealthy. It also allows us to see these class relationships microcosmically between individual characters in detail. Sometimes the way a character speaks reveals the associations that the character makes between the possession of objects and human relationships, as well as the subject/object interaction studied in Chapter 1. It is the subtleties of diction, both in dialogue and Fitzgerald's descriptions of objects, which I will study in this final chapter.

Fitzgerald attaches many implications to the role language can play in the world of objects. As Bill Brown writes in his essay, "The Secret Life of Things,":

[We need to ask] how literature itself works to imagine materiality; how it renders a life of things that is tangential to our narratives of modern production, distribution and consumption; how it can contribute to a materialist phenomenology that does not bracket history, but asks both *how*, in history (how in one cultural formation), human subjects and material objects constitute one another, and what remains outside the regularities of that constitution that can disrupt the cultural memory of modernity and modernism(4).

He is interested in exploring the relationship between humans and objects. In Brown's view, this "life of things" is related to the processes of "production, distribution and consumption" but not completely dependent upon it (4). Other factors such as an individual's past, his or her memories and cultural background, also influence a relationship with objects. Language often provides the method, the rationale, the glue, which ties humans to the objects that they possess. Language also echoes the individual's past and indicates his relationship to objects. As well, objects often gain fluidity through the language that is employed to describe them (2). It is through his dialogue, especially, that F. Scott Fitzgerald is able to manipulate objects to both conceal and reveal the personalities and potentialities of his characters. It is through language that Fitzgerald is able to convey his attitude towards the objects' possessors.

In many ways, dialogue is Fitzgerald's primary device for capturing the full identity of his leisure class characters. In Fitzgerald's story "The Rich Boy," for instance, we encounter Anson Hunter, through whom we begin to see the development of speech at an early age. We see that it is founded on a special relationship between the rich and the objects of their desire. As Fitzgerald explains, "let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard, and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to understand"(Fitzgerald, "Rich" 152). Because of the nature of their upbringing, children who are born rich are inherently different than children born in middle or lower class families. They are exposed to an excess of possessions early on, but are sheltered from reality as well. Anson and his siblings were educated in isolation:

he and his brother had an English governess who spoke the language very clearly and crisply and well, so that the two boys grew to speak as she did—their words and sentences were all crisp and clear and not run together as ours are. They didn't talk exactly like English children but acquired an accent that is peculiar to fashionable people in the city of New York (153).

Because they are educated in a very unique way, with a governess chosen for her clear speech and certain inflection, these boys do not speak like the average American child. They are, from the beginning, a curiosity among the population of the Connecticut town where they summer. Thus at a young age, Anson forms a sense of superiority, which permanently affects his personality and hardens him towards his future experiences. He is used to being above those who surround him and he develops a “sort of impatience with all groups of which he was not the center—in money, in position, in authority—[which] remained with him for the rest of his life”(153-4). Anson's peers notice his sense of superiority and it has both positive and negative implications for him. At Yale it separates him from those around him, as they see as a form of snobbery. He becomes the center of New York social life, but it cripples his attempts at love.

Daisy Buchanan, also a part of the social elite, described in “The Rich Boy,” is separate from the average American as well. Though women such as Myrtle hope to possess Daisy's attractive qualities, the reader is aware that this is impossible. It is through Daisy's upbringing that she develops her sense of mystery and allure that draws all the soldiers from Camp David towards her during the war. Gatsby notices this and remarks to Nick, ““Her voice is full of money,””( Fitzgerald, Gatsby 127). Nick realizes, ““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"(127). All the elements of Daisy's upbringing, being sheltered from the real world as well as careful instruction under an English governess, are evident in her voice. Daisy's voice has acquired the melodic perfection that can only be obtained from years of speech lessons. When she speaks, her voice invokes images of a sheltered princess, preserved by her parents for an eligible bachelor. Daisy and her voice represent everything that a man desires his wife to be, but like money it is slippery, almost unattainable.

Daisy Buchanan, as Tom's wife, is his most prized possession. She is the female equivalent of a cut-glass bowl, both decorative and useful in social gatherings. As with his relationship with Myrtle, Tom desires to be in complete control of Daisy. Tom takes this complete possession of his wife for granted. While he runs off to New York with Myrtle, Tom imagines Daisy to be completely secluded on their estate, patiently awaiting his return. He is so protective of her that he even forbids Myrtle to mention her name. Tom becomes so angry when Myrtle repeatedly says, "Daisy" over and over again that he, allowing his emotions to possess him, breaks her nose (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 41). Thus we see an example of Bill Brown's idea that language forms the relationship between the subject, Tom, and the object, Daisy. This is one way in which Fitzgerald's "literature...works to imagine materiality"(4). If properly manipulated, it seems, language can turn Daisy Buchanan, a subject, into one of the many objects that her husband possesses. Another instance when Tom fights for exclusive rights of his wife occurs after he has discovered her affair with Gatsby. He continues his attempts to undermine Gatsby's fragile façade of nobility. Daisy, hoping to protect her lover from

Tom, tells him to stop his jealous ravings. However this only angers him further, ““I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife””(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 137). Here Tom attempts to deny Gatsby by negating him, calling him “Mr. Nobody” who is from “Nowhere.” Not only is Tom fighting for possession of his wife, he is fighting against someone with a mysterious past, someone who certainly is as much an outsider as his mistress Myrtle is.

In his short story, “The Diamond as Big as the Ritz” Fitzgerald explores how wealth in isolation affects the patterns of speech in the Washington family. While on the train traveling from their East Coast prep school to Percy’s home, John and Percy converse on about the wealth of the other boys at school. Percy, whose family’s wealth John is completely ignorant of, begins to open up, ““My father,’ he said, ‘is by far the richest man in the world””(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 77). John is left speechless by the incredulity of this statement. John begins to see the Washingtons’ strange relationships towards objects that develop out of their isolated “society” composed only of family members and servants. For all members of the family, wealth and experience are equal. Thus they all share the same skewed perception of the meaning of wealth and the objects. A pattern of bragging continues throughout their journey to Montana. John, completely unable to relate personally to the Washington family’s supposed incredible wealth, describes the jewels of the Schnlitzer-Murphys with whom he stayed last year. These jewels seem to be larger and more magnificent than anything ever seen, but they soon lose all of their power when Percy describes his childish love for collecting jewels, instead of stamps. Finally, as a last attempt to impress Percy, John tells him, ““diamonds...the Schnlitzer-Murphys had diamonds as big as walnuts””(78). However,



we soon see that this approach does not work. Percy discloses, “‘that’s nothing.’ Percy had leaned forward and dropped his voice to a low whisper, “‘that’s nothing at all. My father has a diamond bigger than the Ritz-Carlton Hotel’”(78). Percy aware that his statement is incredible, lowers his voice so that he will not create attention among their fellow passengers. And once again, John feels himself questioning the veracity of Percy’s statements. If the family truly does possess such a large gem, why has no one ever heard of it?

The way in which Percy, Jasmine and Kismine view their guests as mere commodities to be used for their enjoyment and then “disposed” of is very disturbing. Guests arrive, are amused and treated very well, and when the time comes for them to depart, they are poisoned in their sleep, lest they leave with the Washingtons’ secret. Apparently the older daughter, Jasmine, is particularly careless with others lives. She has always invited numerous guests to join her at the chateau, disregarding the fact that they will ultimately all die, their parents told that they had scarlet fever. Kismine tells John that she will soon warm up to idea and invite her own guests home, “‘I shall probably have visitors too—I’ll harden up to it. We can’t let such an inevitable thing as death stand in the way of enjoying life while we have it. Think how lonesome it’d be out here if we never had *any* one’”(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 101). She abuses the phrase, “‘an inevitable thing as death,’” substituting it for a *carpe diem* sensibility. Death is not merely inevitable for the Washingtons’ guests, its time and location is fixed. Rather than live in isolation on their estate, Kismine and her family choose to invite guests to stay, forming temporary friendships, and then murdering them. Their need for human contact is understandable, but their means of attaining it is inhuman. People are transformed into

commodities in order to give them brief pleasure. When Kismine says, ““there go fifty thousand dollars’ worth of slaves...at prewar prices. So few Americans have any respect for property,”” she may as well be speaking about the guests invited to stay on the estate (105).

Fitzgerald uses a variety of specific techniques with language such as manipulation of objects, understatement and framing narrators and to show his character’s social positions as well as their mental states. In The Great Gatsby and his other works of fiction, Fitzgerald uses language to manipulate objects, depicting their dynamic qualities. Like Woolf in her short story “Solid Objects,” Fitzgerald’s fiction is not “about solidity, but about fluidity of objects, about how they decompose and recompose themselves as the object of a new fascination,”(Brown 2). In Woolf’s case John, the protagonist, collects fragments of objects, which he pieces together in his mind, transforming them back to their original source (Brown 3). Fitzgerald, however, manipulates language so that objects take on unusual characteristics in particular situations. In his novel, The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald alters the color of objects, shifting their mood. The most famous instance of manipulating color occurs in the green light, which is at the end of the Buchanan’s dock. Fitzgerald purposefully shifts the natural warm yellow glow of the dock light to an unusual color, green. Green, the color of spring and of rebirth, represents Gatsby’s hope for a continuation of his love affair with Daisy. Nick notices this unusual light after visiting Daisy and Tom’s house for the first time. Arriving home, he approaches a shadowy figure of a man who he supposes is Mr. Gatsby in attempt to call out, but refrains when he notices “[the figure] stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and far as I was from him I could have sworn he

was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward—and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 26). Gatsby is alone, stretching toward his goal, Daisy Buchanan and the green light which represents his hope for reuniting with her once again. This hope is the sole drive in his life, bringing him upwards to this point financially and socially.

In another instance of color shift, Fitzgerald describes Gatsby’s gardens as blue, not the typical green of plant life. Nick tells the reader that Gatsby’s house was the social setting of the season, “in his blue gardens men and girls came went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 43). Fitzgerald refrains from using green here, because that color represents Gatsby’s hope. Blue is darker, more expressive of Gatsby’s mood during his gatherings. He is filled with discontent at his present position as a facilitator for others’ amusement. Gatsby has no interest in the fleeting pleasures of the leisure class, he throws his parties in order to capture Daisy’s life-long love.

While Fitzgerald uses language to manipulate the color of objects, he also employs techniques that allow him to transform a human being into a material good. In Chapter 3 of The Great Gatsby, he explores the effects of leisure class lifestyle on relationships between husbands and their wives as these couples attend Gatsby’s party. As one husband flirts with a young actress, his wife “appear[s] suddenly at his side like an angry diamond and hiss[es], ‘You promised!’ into his ear”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 56). Interrupting his momentary pleasure, this man’s wife becomes a luxurious and extravagant possession, which has begun to show its flaws. For the leisure class men

who attend Gatsby's parties, their wives, worn ornamentally at their sides and the luxury goods they are required to wear in society, are equally a necessary evil.

Fitzgerald uses understated language in his tale "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" to draw attention to how the imposed isolation and wealth of the Washington family creates a warped concept of possession and valuing of human life. In this short story it seems that Fitzgerald has interpreted Bill Brown's inquiry about "*how* [literature], in history (how, in one cultural formation), human subjects and material objects constitute one another," in depicting the Washington family as a microcosm of the leisure class (4). In this instance, it is the fictional Washington family's Montana estate which provides the sole cultural environment from which the family develops a relationship towards objects. One form of language employed by Fitzgerald, understatement, is best able to capture their careless attitude towards material objects. Percy, in telling John about his family history, explains the necessity of extreme secrecy. His grandfather, Fitz-Norman Washington "was compelled, due to a series of unfortunate complications, to murder his brother, whose unfortunate habit of drinking himself into an indiscreet stupor had several times endangered their safety. But very few other murders stained these happy years of progress and expansion"(Fitzgerald, "The Diamond" 88). Thus the reader sees that the happy tranquility that has thus far been presented is a front for much darker actions. The Washington family must kill those people they deem possible leaks of information. It is the way in which their methods for maintaining secrecy are presented that is most disturbing. Fitzgerald uses the word "unfortunate" to describe the death of Fitz-Norman's brother instead of a stronger adjective, tragic or horrific (Fitzgerald, "The Diamond" 88). This word is repeated in describing his alcoholism, also an inappropriate

use. Words such as destructive or dangerous would have highlighted his addiction better. In the next sentence this time period is described as being, “happy years,” during which time “very few other murders” occurred (Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 88). The death of a family member in this fashion does not indicate a happy, carefree, civilized era, but one of suppression, fear and barbarism.

The attitude of disregard for other human lives continues into the present generation of Washingtons. Percy explains to John that these five square miles are the only ones in the United States that have not been surveyed. His family has spent a good deal of effort and money in keeping their estate secret from the rest of the world, however airplanes that can scan the ground from the air, may be their downfall. He casually mentions that the family has ““half a dozen anti-aircraft guns and we’ve arranged [deterring them] so far—but there’ve been a few deaths and a great many prisoners. Not that we mind *that*, you know, my father and I, but it upsets mother and the girls, and there’s always the chance that some time we won’t be able to arrange it””(Fitzgerald, “The Diamond” 81). This is the first mention of the Washington family’s attitude towards death that we see in the story. These statements seem to greatly disturb John who wonders “should [the pilots] fail to fall into the trap, did a quick puff of smoke and a sharp round of a splitting shell bring them drooping to earth—and ‘upset’ Percy’s mother and sisters”(81). As a result of understated dialogue Percy uses to discuss the family’s manner of defense, John, an outsider is left disoriented and confused. John attempts to separate the two experiences, the pilot’s ignorance followed by fear and death and the Washington woman’s concern over the incident. Normal reactions of being horrified and saddened at a violent death are transformed into the irrational hysterical behavior in

Percy's world. As a result of Fitzgerald's use of understatement, the reader is left wondering about John's upcoming experiences on the Washington estate.

Fitzgerald's most extensive language technique is his use of a framing narrator, a principal character whose views and background shape a specific work. His most famous frame narrator is Nick Carraway of The Great Gatsby, the upper class Midwestern neighbor of Gatsby. It is interesting that Fitzgerald chooses Nick, who possesses a leisure class background but little fortune, to be the narrator of his novel. Fitzgerald, it appears, wants to explore the subject matter of class change through the eyes of someone who is both a part of the leisure class as well as separate from the high speed, careless world of the Buchanans. In this unique social position, Nick can judge his cousins the Buchanans, as well as outsiders such as Gatsby. Fitzgerald begins by showing us the value system from which Nick's impressions are formed. This value system comes his father, who tells him, "“whenever you feel like criticizing anyone...just remember that all the people in the world haven't had the advantages you've had”"(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 5). This statement, Nick explains, he has interpreted to mean to be cautious in judging others. This open quality has proved a burden for him, as he unwillingly attracted the confidences of classmates in college. Though Nick presents himself as being non-judgmental, Fitzgerald allows us to see through these statements to the attitudes behind them. Nick may give others leeway, however, at the same time he is conscious of his superiority over them. Nick continues by explaining that after the war, he came back wanting nothing of the sort of confidences he been a part of in the past, "I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart"(6). Nick would

like to live his life without interruptions from other people's hopes and dreams. He wants life to be well ordered and free from the sorts of emotions on which relationships are built. Though Nick attempts to keep free from such associations, it is his approachability which allows him to participate in much of the action of the novel. Tom Buchanan, feeling Nick is a confidant, takes him to meet his mistress Myrtle. Gatsby employs Nick to set up a meeting with Daisy, trusting him instinctively.

The dialogue of all of Fitzgerald's characters reveals not only their social status but internal states as well. Fitzgerald uses speech in a unique way, creating emotional effects from the influence of external circumstances that his characters are subjected to. These elements, in altering quality of speech, change the relationship between subject and the object. In the story, "The Rich Boy," Anson Hunter often finds a refuge from feelings of isolation, social and relationship pressure and inadequacy in liquor. The narrator tells us that when Anson enlisted "everyone liked him, and though he ran with the drinkers and wasn't an especially good pilot, even the instructors treated him with a certain respect"(Fitzgerald, "Rich" 155). Before his troubles drove him towards excessive drinking Anson was "always having long talks with them in his confident, logical voice—talks which ended by his getting himself, or, more frequently, another officer, out of some impending trouble"(155). Anson is able to manipulate language in a skilled manner even while under the influence of alcohol and as such he can get these men out of disagreements. His manner of speech proves both his usefulness and loyalty, two things that are prized in the navy. Thus his "confident, logical voice," the same voice that isolated him at Yale and prevented him from forming friendships with his classmates, now proves valuable.

After falling in love with Paula Legendre, a conservative girl from California, Anson's manner and thus his language changes. Anson abandons the other officers, is rarely seen in public and when he does, he and Paula "[are] engaged in a long serious dialogue, which must have gone on several weeks. Long afterward he told me that it was not about anything in particular but was composed on both sides of immature and even meaningless statements...It was a sort of hypnosis"(Fitzgerald, "Rich"155). Thus his "logical confidence" transforms into a meaningless continual dialogue, which is typical of a couple so completely absorbed in the newness of their relationship. After their relationship turns physical, they talk about marriage and soon Anson sees Paula as his potential possession. His passion for her and its accompanying social pressures prove too great for him and he more and more frequently turns to alcohol as a balm. One night Anson is particularly drunk after an evening drinking with friends at the Yale Club. He returns to the Ritz to meet Paula and her cousin, aware that he is uncontrollably drunk. He attempts to engage in conversation with the cousin, but finds it difficult to control his speech. Recalling the incident after the two have departed, Cousin Jo tells Mrs. Legendre that Anson "'said he was French. I didn't know he was French...he said he was brought up in France. He said he couldn't speak any English, and that's why he couldn't talk to me. And he couldn't!'"(157). It becomes obvious to Paula's mother that her daughter's fiancée has said these things to cover up that fact that he was drunk. Unable to pronounce words properly under the influence of the many cocktails which he drank at the Yale Club, Anson retreats into his usual refuge, announcing that he speaks no English, in attempt to cover up his desperate state. Not only does alcohol affect his pronunciation, slurring his speech, it also influences his judgment of appropriate subject



matter. Anson makes a ridiculous declaration that he is French in order to cover up the fact that he cannot speak properly. However, this statement only draws attention to his intoxication. Only a person as naïve as Cousin Jo would fail to notice this tactic's purpose. Under the influence of alcohol he also unintentionally submits his fiancé to songs with crude lyrics. Anson's speech patterns and choices regarding the types of language he uses are at odds with his relationship with Paul Legendre.

In Chapter 1 of his novel The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald explores how restless boredom affects Daisy Buchanan's dialogue. Unlike Nick, who spends his days attempting the bond business, Tom and Daisy, as true members of the leisure class, are not required to make their living in any traditional sense. Through a close study of a conversation that Nick witnesses at dinner we see the effects of their inaction. Sitting down to dinner, Daisy focuses her attention on candles placed on the table:

“‘Why *candles?*’ objected Daisy frowning. She snapped them out with her fingers. ‘In two weeks it’ll be the longest day in the year.’ She looked at us all radiantly. ‘Do you always watch for the longest day of the year and then miss it? I always watch for the longest day in the year and then miss it.’

‘We ought to plan something,’ yawned Miss Baker, sitting down at the table as if she were getting into bed.

‘All right,’ said Daisy. ‘What’ll we plan?’ She turned to me helplessly. ‘What do people plan?’

Before I could answer her eyes fastened with an awed expression on her little finger.

‘Look!’ she complained. ‘I hurt it!’”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 16).

Daisy, bored by her unchanged surroundings, is elated to have realized a shift, the approach of summer. She then poses a question about the approach of summer to her tablemates. However instead of waiting for a response, she impatiently answers it herself. Daisy needs to feel that she is the center of attention and by denying the opinions of others she feels that she is establishing this. No one in the party, Jordan, Tom or Nick, respond to her question. Instead, Jordan, changes the subject, suggesting they mark the occasion with a party. Daisy, intrigued by the idea of hosting a party, joins in this new conversation topic, completely forgetting its purpose. However, Daisy, feeling threatened by Jordan's dominance of this subject matter, shifts the discussion once again, bringing up her hurt finger. In doing this she hopes to draw sympathy from the other diners, and redistribute all attention from Jordan towards herself. From this study of the meal's conversation it becomes apparent that Daisy has the attention span of a small child. As soon as the conversation threatens to turn towards a subject other than herself, she shifts the focus. Everything occurs in relation to Daisy Buchanan, *she* always forgets the longest day of the year and *she* injured her figure in a dispute with her husband. From this close study of Fitzgerald's dialogue, the Buchanan's emerge as a model for the leisure class, constantly trying to escape boredom through movement.

In Fitzgerald's story, "Bernice Bobs Her Hair," he explores how the state of nervousness can affect an individual's speech patterns. When Marjorie's cousin Bernice comes to visit for the month of August she becomes a social failure. This is mostly due to the fact that she has not been properly educated in grooming, manners of dress and behavior, and so she allows her nerves to take over. She feels completely foreign in Marjorie's world of country club dances and other social engagements. Warren

McIntyre, an admirer of Marjorie's beauty, volunteers to dance with the bore, cousin Bernice. He attempts to talk to her within the social framework in which his class is accustomed. However, as we see, this effort is a massive failure. First Warren, taking pity on a girl who has received very little attention during her stay, tries to flirt with Bernice. Feeling it his duty to continue the conversation, Warren "with a sudden charitable impulse...decided to try part of his line on her. He turned and looked at her eyes. 'You've got an awfully kissable mouth,'" (Fitzgerald, "Bernice" 28). This sort of "breathless confession" could be used to obtain a kiss from a willing participant or maybe lead to a laugh and more conversation from a more refined girl. However, sheltered Bernice has never been the object of such a remark before, and so she blushes and becomes quite flustered. In this moment of discomfort she accidentally blurts out "fresh." This not only startles her dancing partner, but also throws Bernice off, as she was just beginning to realize the compliment that Warren had been attempting to pay her (28). She realizes this after it is too late, and Warren shifts to discussing the couples at the dance. Bernice knows that her moment as a possible love interest has passed. Unlike her cousin Marjorie, men like Warren do not desire to kiss her. Feeling both dissatisfied with her behavior, as well as continued nervousness, Bernice makes a second blunder. She makes a comment about a couple who are financially unfortunate and so have been kept from marriage, "'oh, yes,' she said, and laughed. 'I hear they've been mooning round for years without a red penny. Isn't it silly?'" (29). Feeling small from her previous conversation, Bernice instinctively belittles those who are more unfortunate than herself, in turn causing Warren to view her with more disgust. She allows her dialogue to become completely consumed by her emotions and is unable to filter her statements

before they leave her mouth. She is unaware that her actions may seem in bad taste to Warren but instead as Fitzgerald tells us, “Bernice had had no intention of sneering. She was merely nervous”(29).

In his novel, The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald concerns himself with the language of outsiders, the misused phrases Myrtle Wilson and Jay Gatsby adopt in an effort to infiltrate leisure class society. They both are romantically involved with individuals who are a part of the upper classes and both desire to reach them in social status. In their attempts to do so, both adapt phrases which they equate with the socially superior. Myrtle adopts “my dear” which allows her to talk down to both her guests the McKees and her older sister Catherine. Myrtle is employing elements of her cultural memory, adapting a phrase she recalls reading about in the magazines purchased at the drugstore. These words, coming from a mass-produced source, become commodified when used by Myrtle. Ironically, she is attempting to associate herself not with the glitz and glamour of new money and Hollywood stardom but with the condescending attitude, which comes with growing up with money. She is attempting to be Tom’s feminine equal. As well as applying Gilded Age culture, this phrase also implies possession. All those who Myrtle addresses are reduced to objects, props that surround her and with their admiration of how far she has come. Like the tapestried furniture, her cream colored dress and her little apartment itself, these guests are possessions which declare her position in society. However, these middle-class guests, with their blind admiration of Myrtle and confidence that she will one day marry Tom Buchanan, belie the fact that she is not in Nick or Tom’s social class. Myrtle, feeling elated with her luck in finding Tom Buchanan, is unaware that as she attempts to possess her guests by calling them “my dear,” to Tom she is

merely a timely object of his lust. Tom will soon grow tired of her and move onto his next affair.

Gatsby, too, adopts his own phrase “old sport” in an effort to fit in with the East Eggers who flock to his parties. Gatsby is using language in attempt to erase his past in order to form a new relationship between him and objects. He no longer merely desires those objects, but possesses them and many more. “Old sport” sounds hollow to Nick the first time he hears it and he comments, “the familiar expression held no more familiarity than the hand which reassuringly brushed my shoulder”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 57). It becomes clear that Fitzgerald, who awkwardly places these words on Gatsby’s tongue, wants the reader to be aware of Gatsby’s misuse of this phrase, which is meant to indicate familiarity and similar social position. Members of the same country club might call each other “old sport” to express their connection. Gatsby makes poor use of this phrase, to address Nick and others partygoers who are meeting Gatsby for the first time.

It is interesting to note that when Nick goes into the city with Gatsby and meets Meyer Wolfshiem, Gatsby never once calls Wolfshiem “old sport.” This is a man who has known Gatsby since he came back from the war and who is responsible for his fortune. It becomes clear that Gatsby does not want there to be any tie, any sense of familiarity, between himself and the man who fixed the World Series in 1919. Wolfshiem is a common gambler with obvious illegal ties. Even though he knows Gatsby better than all the East Eggers with whom Gatsby surrounds himself, Gatsby cuts him, as well as most aspects of his past, out of his life. In having Gatsby avoid using “old sport” when talking to Wolfshiem, Fitzgerald shows him deliberately attempting to break with his past. It is also important to note that the phrase “old sport” is associated with

upper classes, with “old” money that has connections with semi-aristocratic social codes. Wolfshiem, though smart enough to fix the World Series and evade jail, improperly pronounces Oxford as “Oggsford” and thus is quite separate from this world that Gatsby is hoping to reach (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 76).

In contrast to Wolfshiem, to whom “old sport” has no connection, members of the leisure class find Gatsby’s phrase inappropriate. Threatened by the false relationship created between Gatsby and the objects that he possesses, Tom Buchanan is especially angered by the use of “old sport.” In commenting on this ridiculous choice of words, Tom hopes to show Daisy who Gatsby really is, an imposter. He is angered that West Egg resident Gatsby would suppose he is on equal social terms with the Buchanan family of East Egg. At first Tom Buchanan questions the origins of the phrase in the same manner in which he questions all aspects of James Gatz’s creation of Gatsby, ““all this ‘old sport’ business. Where’d you pick that up?””(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 134). It is obvious to Tom that not only is Gatsby’s new money, but also that he is trying desperately to fit in to the upper class. Tom can easily smell an imposter and he sees Gatsby’s phrase as ridiculous, comical, a sure sign that he has read too many Gilded Age novels. As Tom continues to expose Gatsby, the expression takes on new meaning. Tom tells the whole party in New York about Gatsby’s connections with Wolfshiem and the disgrace of one of Tom’s friends Walter in connection with one of their schemes. Gatsby attempts to defend himself, addressing Tom as “old sport” trying to appease Tom and calm him down. However it has the opposite effect, ““don’t you call me ‘old sport’!””(141). Tom is angered that someone as base as Gatsby would attempt to equate himself with the Buchanan family.

Though at first Nick is disapproving of Gatsby's use of "old sport," over time, as Nick becomes familiar with Gatsby, he becomes more and more accepting of the phrase as it begins to denote a sense of true friendship and shared experience. After Daisy kills Myrtle Wilson in a car accident, Nick comes over to Gatsby's huge empty house and Gatsby tells him about how he made his fortune and how he met Daisy. This deeply personal moment is one in which Gatsby becomes truly alive for Nick. Gatsby confides, "I can't describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport. I even hoped for a while that she'd throw me over, but she didn't, because she was in love with me too" (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 157). This moment is a revelation for Nick, a glimpse into the mysterious Gatsby's heart and mind. Gatsby shares the excitement and fear that accompanies love with Nick, and at this point the phrase "old sport" transforms from a superficial imitation of leisure class manners to an expression of a true friendship. At the closing of the novel, Nick is able to connect with and interpret language of Gatsby. He becomes an insider by which the reader sees the meaning of language and objects.

Nick comes east with a sense of superiority over the types of people who live in West Egg, with its hideously large mansions. At the same time he feels separated from the people who live across the Long Island Sound, in East Egg, by his family's financial problems and a sense of morals, which careless Daisy and Tom Buchanan do not seem to possess. Though he may come from a similar background as his cousin, he has not adopted her reckless attitude towards objects. It is apparent from the beginning through Fitzgerald's language that Nick takes everything they say or do with a grain of salt:

they had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This was a

permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it—I had no sight into Daisy's heart but I felt that Tom would drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game (Fitzgerald, Gatsby 10).

Nick is aware that Tom and Daisy are a part of the wealthy leisure class developing after the war. Like Nick they are both from old families, but unlike him, the family money is plentiful. Here he depicts the Buchanans as drifters in life, moving whenever they felt they had stayed in one place for too long. Though Nick may be accustomed to such people, his disdain for their behavior comes through in the novel. Tom is constantly searching for a life that will compare to his glory days on the football field at Yale, something that is unattainable. He constantly needs to feel the hero, however now his role has shifted, rescuing the “damsels in distress,” his lower class mistresses from their dreary lives, even if it is only for a short time.

Despite Nick's system of morals, it is because of his openness that he is able to discover the essence of Gatsby. He tells us that despite Gatsby's lavish lifestyle “only Gatsby the man who gave his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn”(Fitzgerald, Gatsby 6). It is Gatsby's personality, which mirrors Nick's own character that draws him towards Gatsby. Upon their first meeting, both men find an openness in one another that is reassuring and creates the bonds of friendship, the only true friendship in the novel. As Gatsby introduces himself to Nick,

he smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come



across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you had hope to convey (52-3)

It is apparent through Fitzgerald's language that Gatsby's smile, with the openness that it seems to convey, mirrors Nick's non-judgmental quality which makes him ideal for confidences. Fitzgerald chooses to employ the words, "understandingly" and "eternal reassurance" which are reminiscent of "reserving judgments" and "tolerance" from the first chapter, used in description of Nick. He finds something of himself in Gatsby, however in a magnificent scale.

Though Nick attempts to avoid forming any connections between himself and social climbing Gatsby, he becomes so intrigued by Gatsby from the beginning that he unknowingly embarks on a quest to discover his innermost thoughts and secrets. In his changing perceptions of Gatsby's diction, Nick shows the reader that for Fitzgerald, language, can become an object. "My dear" and "old sport" are employed in the same way as Myrtle's cream-colored dress and Gatsby's pink suit, by outsiders attempting to infiltrate the world of the rich.

As discussed in Chapter 2, through "The Liberal Imagination" of Lionel Trilling, class mobility such as Myrtle Wilson's and Jay Gatsby's creates a conflict between these outsiders and the leisure class society they desire to infiltrate. Newfound wealth in the post-World War I era allows the gap to close between these two groups economically. However, snobbery, "pride in status without pride in function," forms in members of the

leisure class as they begin to look not only the monetary value of an object, but also at the individual who possesses it. They notice how the object is handled and worn by this individual, thereby exposing his past. Thorstein Veblen's The Theory of the Leisure Class, described in Chapter 1, shows us the values and vices of this powerful social force, the leisure class. All "labors" of this group are directed towards "pecuniary emulation." Through the consumption of material goods they assert their status. Middle class individuals also become a part of this cycle of emulation, however as Veblen points out they are already far behind. Leisure Class individuals spend their time not only consuming objects, but in perfecting social codes. These codes, as evidenced in mannerisms and language, cannot be properly adopted by outsiders. Individuals like Fitzgerald's Myrtle and Gatsby are unable to become a true part of leisure class, and must be consigned to be outsiders. Fitzgerald is preoccupied by the efforts of this outsider to be accepted by leisure class society and his constant failure to do so. For Fitzgerald the object presents the outsider with a paradox, it is easily attainable with the advent of mass production and newfound affluence, however the social status it promises to bring is unreachable.

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