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Fitzgerald's Use of the Four Elements in *The Great Gatsby*

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FITZGERALD'S USE OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS

IN THE GREAT GATSBY

(TITLE)

BY

JOHN PHILIP HAWKINS

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1979

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FITZGERALD'S USE OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS
IN THE GREAT GATSBY

BY

JOHN PHILIP HAWKINS

B. A. in English, Eastern Illinois University, 1975

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in English at the Graduate School
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A great deal has been written about the conscientious effort that went into the design of F. Scott Fitzgerald's popular novel, The Great Gatsby, with its various allusions and numerous symbols. A careful reading of this novel will unveil the author's preoccupation with numerous metaphysical images, particularly the four elements--air, earth, water, and fire--which are considered to be the essential components of all matter.

Fitzgerald uses the four elements in The Great Gatsby to coordinate mood and physical settings, to give dimension to the settings, and to bring characters into sharper focus. The novel employs four settings, each one directly corresponding to a particular element: East Egg--air, the valley of ashes--earth, West Egg--water, and New York City--fire. Most of the characters in the novel are directly related to the symbolic qualities of three of the elements, air, earth, and water. Characters metaphorically defined by the elements include Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and George Wilson who are characterized through air imagery, Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson who are associated with earth, and Jay Gatsby who is presented in water imagery. Fire serves primarily as a force that metaphorically burns away obscurities and reveals the true motives and personalities

of each character. Even Nick Carraway, the narrator of the novel, who seems to have a balance of the elements and gets along equally well with all the characters, is forced to re-evaluate the people in the heat of the Plaza Hotel showdown in New York City between Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Nick remains objective throughout the novel until the last chapter when he becomes impressed by Gatsby's intense faith, loyalty, and determination toward his dream of reliving the past. Nick finds that Gatsby indeed is an admirable person in comparison to the reckless society of the East represented by Tom and Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker.

The valley of ashes, symbolic of the moral wasteland of the East and representative of the element earth, becomes the tragic backdrop of The Great Gatsby. Earth triumphs in the metaphorical dimensions of the elemental structure of the story. It is within this setting that the wealthy Buchanans and Jordan Baker most obviously display their indifference to human morality, leaving three innocent victims in the path of their destruction. Earth's most representative character, Tom Buchanan, emerges relatively unscathed; his selfishness and insensitivity make it possible for him to accept the loss of Myrtle Wilson without lasting pain.

A great deal has been written about the conscientious effort that went into the design of F. Scott Fitzgerald's popular novel, The Great Gatsby, with its various allusions and numerous symbols. Fitzgerald himself in planning the novel said that he intended to make it a "consciously artistic achievement."¹ A careful reading of The Great Gatsby will unveil the author's preoccupation with numerous metaphysical images, particularly the four elements--air, earth, water, and fire--which are considered essential components of all matter. Fitzgerald uses the four elements to distinguish settings and to characterize individuals associated with the settings. The novel employs four settings, each one directly corresponding to a particular element: East Egg--air, West Egg--water, the valley of ashes--earth, and New York City--fire. He uses three of the elements to delineate characters, with air embodied by Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and George Wilson, earth by Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson, and water by Jay Gatsby. Fire does not describe any particular character, but functions as a force that causes interaction between the characters. Fitzgerald uses the four elements in The Great Gatsby as metaphors to coordinate mood and physical settings, to give dimension to the settings, and to bring characters

¹ Andrew Turnbull, ed., The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p. 163.

into sharper focus.

The four-element theory is derived from the Greek philosopher Empedocles in the fifth century B.C. and was originally intended to account for the basis of all material existence in the universe.² According to this theory, air, earth, and water are the basis of all matter, with fire acting as the temperature which brings about the transformation of the other elements.³ Since the era of Empedocles, this hypothesis has been expanded to include the four elements as not only the roots of material existence, but also the basis of spiritual life. Characteristics of the elements are believed to be reflected in the human spirit.⁴ An airy person is often associated with liberty and movement; an earthy person usually has a desire for riches, which is often considered an impediment; an aquatic person is related to softness and repose; a fiery person is passionate and loving.⁵ Most of the characters in The Great Gatsby are directly related to the traditional symbolic qualities of three of the elements: air, earth, and water. Fire serves primarily as a force that metaphorically burns away obscurities and reveals the true motives

² "The Pluralists: Empedocles," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967 ed. VI, p. 444.

³ J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1962), p. 91.

⁴ Cirlot, p. 91.

⁵ Cirlot, p. 91.

and personalities of each character. Even Nick Carraway, the narrator of the story, who functions equally well with all the elements, is forced to re-evaluate the characters in the heat of the Plaza Hotel showdown between Tom Buchanan and Jay Gatsby. Nick remains objective throughout the novel until the last chapter when he sympathizes with Gatsby, the character associated with water. Other characters metaphorically defined by the elements include Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and George Wilson, who are characterized through air imagery, and Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson, who are associated with earth.

In various mythologies the element air provides the medium for free movement. Air is often considered the essential ingredient of human freedom, and we generally find the element associated with the symbolism of light, weightlessness, flight, and the color white.⁶

Images of air and flight are predominant in Nick Carraway's description of East Egg, particularly in the novel's opening chapter. This imagery begins as Nick arrives at the Buchanan mansion "on a windy evening."⁷ Upon entering the living room, he observes:

⁶ Cirlot, pp. 5-6.

⁷ F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), p. 6. Subsequent Gatsby quotations will be drawn from this text.

A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding-cake of the ceiling, and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does on the sea.

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. 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. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor.

(p. 8)

The imagery of buoyancy in these passages depicts an ethereal world in which the inhabitants seem to float or drift like feathers in a breeze. The intangible qualities of the living room suggest the Buchanan lifestyle. Daisy "floats" in the sense that she is free as long as she doesn't have to make decisions. Since Daisy is not sure of what she wants in life, she is satisfied as long as she doesn't have to make a commitment.

One of the major choices of Daisy's life is described in Chapter IV when she must choose between two lovers. On the night before her marriage to Tom Buchanan, Daisy is still unsure as to whether she loves Tom or Gatsby. She gropes around in a drunken stupor and finally sends Jordan Baker to return the pearls Tom has given her as a wedding gift. "Take 'em down-stairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to," she cries (p. 77). "Tell 'em all Daisy's

change' her mine. Say: 'Daisy's change' her mine!'" (p. 77). The next day she marries Tom Buchanan "without so much as a shiver" (p. 78). Apparently Daisy has decided that it was Tom, rather than Gatsby, who could provide her with the materialistic security which would make her content. A similar scene occurs in Chapter VII when Daisy is once again called upon to make the same decision between two lovers--a scene we will discuss later under the element fire.

Jordan Baker, a young professional golfer, is another member of the East Egg society described in air images. She is a frequent visitor at the Buchanan residence, and like Daisy, she dresses in white and always seems haughty and "cool." Even though Nick is attracted by her physical beauty, he sees Jordan as a careless person who is "incurably dishonest" (p. 58). Nick exposes her as a liar, a cheat, and a careless driver. In one incident, Jordan leaves a borrowed convertible out in the rain with the top down and then lies about it. Nick tells us that she has also been involved in a golf tournament scandal in which she illegally moved the ball. To protect her social status and avoid scandal, she apparently paid off the caddy to retract his statement. Later, when Nick protests against her careless driving, Jordan assures him that other people will keep out of her way. "It takes two to make an accident," she tells him (p. 59). Like the Buchanans, Jordan is primarily concerned with preserving her appearance in the

prestigious upper class, disregarding the feelings of others. Nick eventually rejects his relationship with Jordan because he is not deceived by her charm and beauty. By the end of the novel he has become disgusted by her carelessness and irresponsibility.

The balloon imagery in Nick's description of the Buchanan mansion seems to indicate a sense of emptiness in the lives of the East Egg characters. Daisy and Jordan appear as almost weightless, "buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon" with their white dresses "rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house" (p. 8). The two girls appear to be sitting on a balloon, susceptible to being impelled in the direction of any force. They are, in fact, controlled by the force of money. In reference to Daisy, Gatsby comments, "Her voice is full of money" (p. 120).

White and light images combine with flight imagery to reinforce a sense of freedom and emptiness with which to characterize the East Egg inhabitants. This imagery also suggests Daisy's and Jordan's amorality and indifference to the feelings of other people. Daisy lives in one of the "white palaces of fashionable East Egg" (p. 5). She dresses in white, her husband talks about the white race, and she is even referred to as having a white face. From Nick's description of the Buchanan living room, we can almost designate white as a dominant feature with the white dresses, the white ceiling, and the curtains, which remind Nick of

"pale flags" (p. 8).

The word "bright" is found throughout the novel as a correlative of light. Light imagery is frequently applied to Daisy.⁸ The heaviest concentration of light imagery appears in Chapter I with Nick's first visit to East Egg. He notes that the Buchanan lawn drifts up the side of the house in "bright vines" (p. 6), while the windows are "glowing . . . with gold of the sunlight" (p. 7). Tom has "two shining arrogant eyes" (p. 7), as he leads Nick inside the crimson living room which "bloomed with light" (p. 18). Nick says that Daisy's face "was sad and lovely with bright things in it, bright eyes and a bright passionate mouth" (p. 9). Later the same evening Nick tells us that "the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face" (p. 14). When Nick is ready to leave, Tom and Daisy stand "side by side in a cheerful square of light" (p. 20) in the "bright night" (p. 21).

George Wilson is another character developed through air imagery. Like Daisy, he leads an empty life void of purpose. He seems to wander around without any sense of direction until he is brought to reality by the shock of Myrtle's death and the direction Tom gives him to find Myrtle's killer. Throughout the novel Wilson appears as a ghostly figure, drifting along with a covering of the

⁸ A. E. Elmore, "Color and Cosmos in The Great Gatsby," Sewanee Review, 78 (1970), p. 429.

ashen dust from his environment. Nick describes him as "a blond, spiritless man, anaemic, and faintly handsome," whose wife appears to walk through him "as if he were a ghost" (p. 25). Even Wilson's environment appears to be haunted in Nick's description of the valley of ashes: "Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest. . . ." (p. 23). At the scene of Myrtle's death, Wilson's voice is heard in "high, groaning words that echoed clamorously through the bare garage" (p. 139). Nick's account of Wilson's distress on this particular occasion is presented in such ghostly noises as "hollow, wailing sound" and "gasping moan" (p. 139). In George Wilson's last appearance in the novel he is again presented in the image of a ghost as he glides along the West Egg landscape in route to kill Gatsby:

A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about . . . like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward [Gatsby] through the amorphous trees. (p. 162)

We might assume from the numerous ghost images that Wilson is in fact characterized as a dead person. He receives very little attention from other characters in the novel, and his life is so dull that not even his wife can stand living with him. At one point Tom even describes the ghostly figure when he says of Wilson, "He's so dumb he doesn't know he's alive" (p. 26).

Just as Daisy is associated with the color white, George Wilson is related to the color gray--a dingy shade of white--pointing contrast between the two characters' social standings. Daisy lives in New York's white, upper-class society, while Wilson resides in the drab, gray environment of the valley of ashes of the lower-middle-class. Wilson is constantly described in dull color images which correspond to his surroundings. In reference to Wilson, Nick says, "A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity" (p. 26). Nick notes that the walls of the garage are a "cement color," (p. 26) and that the "only car visible was the dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner" (p. 25). The gray dust that covers Wilson masks and obscures the fact that George is an emotional person even though he appears lifeless just as the white images of the Buchanan household tend to mask the selfishness and carelessness of Daisy.

The bleak, dusty, sterile landscape described in Chapter II as "a valley of ashes" provides a contrast to the "white palaces of fashionable East Egg." This setting, described in physical terms depicting ground, land, and dust, corresponds to the element earth. This ashen desert is portrayed as a parody of the traditional symbolism of "valley." According to myth, the valley usually represents

fertility and life because it is believed to lie at the level of the sea between hills or mountains.⁹ The valley is considered an area of farm production--a haven for the agrarian and shepherd. In contrast to the fertile land of the valley, the desert is the symbolic place of purification--a hot, sterile region where virtually nothing will grow. Nick Carraway tells us that the valley of ashes is a "waste land," "a solemn dumping ground," "a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens" (p. 23). It is a "gray land" covered with "spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it" (p. 23).

Aside from being the dismal setting of the Wilson garage, the valley of ashes is the central focus for the novel's climax and a vital link to the later tragedy of Gatsby's death. This barren region is commonly seen as representative of the spiritual desolation which seemed to dominate eastern America in the 1920's. During this era of history, the wealthy young generation placed emphasis on pleasure at whatever the cost, rejecting former moral standards and values. Fitzgerald portrays the Buchanans and Jordan Baker as examples of the reckless youth of the twenties. Near the end of the novel Nick summarizes their actions:

They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then

⁹ Cirlot, p. 339.

retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. . . . (p. 181)

It is in the valley of ashes that the wealthy Buchanans most obviously display their indifference to human morality through Tom's love affair and Daisy's careless driving. The primary victims of their moral indifference include two inhabitants of this region: George Wilson, the proprietor of a garage, and his wife Myrtle, Tom's mistress. If the valley of ashes is interpreted as a spiritual wasteland, the "foul dust that floated in the wake of [Gatsby's] dream" would apply to Tom and Daisy. After all, it is Tom who leads Wilson to believe that Gatsby murdered Myrtle because Daisy conceals the fact that she was driving at the time of the accident; therefore, she is partially responsible for Gatsby's death.

Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson are characters synonymous with the valley of ashes and the element earth. Both characters are described in terms of their physical or earthy qualities. Both are self-centered, selfish, and arrogant.

Tom is clearly defined by the narrator as a realist whose primary concern is self-preservation. He has the tendency to awaken other people to the realities of life. The illusory world of the girls floating in the Buchanan living room in the opening chapter ends abruptly as Tom slams the window shut and brings everyone present back to

reality. Tom's action here foreshadows his later confrontation with Gatsby in the hotel scene when he lays claim to Daisy, shattering Gatsby's hope of regaining her. Also, it is Tom's information that aids Wilson in finding the owner of the yellow car that destroyed his wife. Tom's motives are selfish. He tells Nick that " [Wilson] was crazy enough to kill me if I hadn't told him who owned the car" (p. 180).

In Chapter I Tom reveals his concern over the white race losing control of the world:

"Civilization's going to pieces," broke out Tom violently. "I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. . . . The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be-- will be utterly submerged. . . . It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things." (p. 13)

To Tom Buchanan, the difference in races is apparently similar to the difference in social classes. Later in Chapter VII, Tom senses that he is on the verge of losing his wife to Gatsby:

"I suppose the latest thing is to sit and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out. . . . Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white." (p. 130)

Since East Egg and the Buchanans are described throughout the novel in white color imagery, it is obvious that Tom

is referring to his social class as the "white race." Gatsby, because of his inferior social background, represents the black race.

At one point in the novel, Daisy describes her husband as a "brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen. . . ." (p. 12). Tom's brutality is shown when he breaks Myrtle's nose at her apartment. This incident is a reality of life, showing Myrtle that she is not going to replace Daisy in her social climb. His arrogance will not allow her to even mention Daisy's name because Myrtle is of a lower social status. Even though Tom betrays Daisy by being unfaithful, he is willing to protect her as a status symbol. Later, Tom again protects Daisy from Gatsby, calling him a "common swindler," revealing the fact that he has no use for Gatsby and his illegitimate social rise.

Myrtle Wilson is also revealed through much physical description. She is "in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her surplus flesh sensuously as some women can" (p. 25). Nick comments that "there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smouldering" (p. 25), and this vitality "that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur" (pp. 30-31). It is her physical sexual attractiveness that appeals to Tom.

Myrtle's arrogance leads to her disillusionment with her marriage to George because she considers him inferior. She says of her husband, "I married him because I thought

he was a gentleman . . . but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe" (p. 35). In contrast to her husband, Myrtle is never described as being covered with the dust of her environment. She attempts to climb the social ladder away from the shabby world of her husband through her affair with Tom. She pretends to be a part of his society, but the result is vulgarity. "She let four taxicabs drive away before she selected a new one, lavender-colored with gray upholstery" (p. 27). Myrtle's actions at the party in her New York apartment are a gaudy display of her pretentious sophistication. She changes from a "brown figured muslin" dress (p. 26), typical of her drab environment, to "an elaborate afternoon dress of cream-colored chiffon" (p. 30). The chiffon dress is not described as being white like those worn by Daisy and Jordan in Chapter I, but "cream-colored--a distorted shade of white. Myrtle's dress seems to indicate that she is not a pure representative of the upper class, but rather that she is only pretending sophistication. She tells her sister Catherine:

I'm going to give you this dress as soon as I'm through with it. I've got to get another one tomorrow. I'm going to make a list of all the things I've got to get. A massage and a wave, and a collar for the dog and one of those cute little ash-trays where you touch a spring, and a wreath with a black silk bow for mother's grave that'll last all summer. (p. 37)

Myrtle's ultimate attempt to rise above her social class occurs when she repeats Daisy's name at the party. Tom

puts her back into her place by slapping her, indicating the chasm that exists between Daisy and Myrtle.

The dry, barren area of the valley of ashes stands in contrast to the water imagery of West Egg. Images of buoyancy are common to both East Egg and West Egg and their inhabitants, reinforcing a sense of floating, drifting, or free movement not only in air, but also in water. Buoyancy seems to relate to the desires or motives of Daisy and Gatsby and the means by which each character attempts to fulfill them. The East Egg residence of Daisy Buchanan is often described in air imagery, while Gatsby's mansion in West Egg is associated with water. In some places air and water images work in combination. Daisy is portrayed as a restless, unsettled, frivolous woman, drifting through life on a balloon, but firmly anchored in the security of a wealthy atmosphere. Gatsby is depicted as a boat sailing against the current of time in his futile attempt to recapture his lost love. Materialism is the common factor that provides security for each of these characters. To Daisy, wealth is a source of protection; it is a retreat from the threat of having to make decisions. To Gatsby, it is the means for buying his dream.

According to ancient Indian legend, water is the

beginning and the end of all earthly life.¹⁰ The element is believed to be "the preserver of immortal life, circulating throughout the whole of nature, in the form of rain, sap, milk and blood."¹¹ Fitzgerald uses water imagery in The Great Gatsby to describe West Egg, Gatsby's mansions and gardens, and particularly Gatsby himself. His party guests have a "sea-change of faces" while rounds of cocktails have a tendency to "float" (p. 40). Gatsby himself is described in water images. He completes a full cycle of life on water, signifying the beginning and end of his mysterious life. Gatsby was born on water in the sense that he transformed himself into the glamorous personage of Jay Gatsby from the poor farm boy, Jimmy Gatz, in his first meeting with millionaire Dan Cody. Cody's yacht on Lake Superior "represented all the beauty and glamour in the world" to young Gatz (pp. 100-101). The materialistic aspiration gained from Gatsby's acquaintance with Cody gave him a new direction as he set sail for a new course in life.

Gatsby's desire of materialistic gain combines with the idealistic vision of a past romance with Daisy Fay as he attempts to regain his lost love. The water imagery of West Egg gives buoyancy to Gatsby's dream of

¹⁰ Cirlot, p. 345.

¹¹ Cirlot, p. 345.

regaining Daisy--a dream which is essentially reliving the past--as he floats toward that dream. The green light on Daisy's dock, a symbol of Gatsby's dream, is separated from his mansion by a body of water--the Long Island Sound. Gatsby's life is pictured as a boat sailing toward the green light. Nick relates one rumor about Gatsby that suggests the idea that "he didn't live in a house at all, but in a boat that looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore" (p. 98). From Nick's description of the Buchanan mansion in Chapter I, we can see that Daisy also lives aboard a restless, wind-tossed "ship" with its flags flying over the shadow-rippling sea of rug.¹² At one point, Nick says that the Buchanan house "floated suddenly toward us through the dark, rustling trees" (p. 142).

The cycle of Gatsby's life is completed as he dies aboard an air mattress on his swimming pool. The death scene is described in the image of a boat going against the current as a faint wind disturbs the "accidental course" of his mattress (p. 162). On the last page of the novel Nick compares Gatsby and his intense devotion of an idealistic vision to a boat flowing against the

¹² W. J. Harvey, "Theme and Texture in The Great Gatsby," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby, ed. Ernest Lockridge (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 95.

current of time, resulting in a ceaseless, backward motion.

Rain appears during two major events of the novel, serving as the background for the first reunion between Daisy and Gatsby, and later as a dreary backdrop for Gatsby's funeral. In its first appearance, rain serves to strengthen Gatsby's hope of regaining Daisy. Nick notes that her face is "smeared" with tears and that a "confounding" change had come over Gatsby (p. 90). Nick says that "without a word or a gesture of exultation a new well-being radiated from him and filled the little room" (p. 90). Rain also provides the grand finale at Gatsby's funeral--a final declaration that his cycle of life aboard the symbolic sea of time is completed.

In contrast to the water imagery of West Egg, downtown New York has for its characteristic heat or fire, the Heraclitian agent of destruction.¹³ This element is often associated with confusion, anger, and hatred. Although fire appears briefly early in the novel in reference to the hot summer days Nick spends in New York, it dominates Chapter VII. In this chapter the novel's major characters are brought together for the first time at the Buchanan mansion and again later the same day at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. Nick

¹³ Cirlot, p. 101.

tells us that this particular day is "almost the last, certainly the warmest" of summer, and the atmosphere is one of "broiling heat" (p. 114).

The heat of the city in Chapter VII acts as a catalyst amidst the confusion of the confrontation between Tom and Gatsby, bringing out the true motives and revealing the true personalities of Daisy, Tom, and Gatsby. Tom's heated accusations directed at Gatsby result in emotional stress, tension, and confusion for these three characters, particularly Daisy. She is unable to withstand the demands of Gatsby to tell Tom that she doesn't love him. The heat gradually purifies Daisy's emotions as she comes to realize that her flirtation with Gatsby is only a whim, that her true values are materialistic, and that Tom is her only security. Daisy also comes to realize that she can't have security, status and Gatsby at the same time. She must forsake one of her lovers, so she renounces Gatsby. "Oh, you want too much! . . . I love you now--isn't that enough! I can't help what's past. I did love Tom once--but I loved you too" (p. 133).

The heat of the argument purifies Tom in the sense that it seems to burn away any indifference he has toward Daisy. He comes to realize that despite his love affairs, he needs Daisy for his security and status. Tom confesses, "Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time" (p. 132). Seeing that Daisy is about to

break under the pressure of his confidential remarks about their relationship, Tom adds his final comment to dishearten Gatsby: "Why--there're things between Daisy and me that you'll never know, things that neither of us can ever forget" (p. 133).

Gatsby is singed by the heat of this confrontation. Tom's accusations in front of Daisy embarrass Gatsby because they unveil his mysterious past and reveal him to be involved in illegal activities. Gatsby is "burned" when Daisy rejects him for Tom, but apparently the shock of her renunciation only "burns" him slightly enough to shake him. Gatsby is left confused and unsure of Daisy's intentions. Nick leaves us with the impression that Gatsby actually expected a phone call from her the next day.

Confusion, usually associated with heat, plays an intricate role in the events of that incredibly hot day. Upon the arrival of Tom, Nick, and Jordan at the Wilson garage before continuing on to the city, George Wilson discloses his suspicion of his wife's unfaithfulness. Nick says that the shock of finding out such a thing "had made him physically sick" (p. 124). Nick also notices that Myrtle Wilson is "peering down" at Tom's car from an upstairs window of the garage (p. 25). Nick relates the scene:

So engrossed was she that she had no consciousness of being observed, and one emotion after another crept into her face like objects into a slowly developing

picture. Her expression was curiously familiar . . . it seemed purposeless and inexplicable until I realized that her eyes, wide with jealous terror, were fixed not on Tom, but on Jordan Baker, whom she took to be his wife. (p. 125)

Myrtle's confusion results from two false assumptions: that not only is the woman in Tom's car his wife, but also that Tom apparently owns a yellow car. When the yellow automobile returns later that evening, Myrtle assumes Tom to be the driver. She steps out in front of it in an effort to flag him down.

When Tom learns that Wilson plans to take his wife out West in an attempt to save their marriage, he becomes distressed at the thought of losing both his mistress and his wife. As the trio pulls away from the garage, Nick says:

There is no confusion like the confusion of a simple mind, and as we drove away Tom was feeling the hot whips of panic. His wife and his mistress, until an hour ago secure and inviolate, were slipping precipitately from his control. (p. 125)

Daisy becomes confused in the hotel room when she is forced to choose between Tom and Gatsby. The pressure of having to commit herself leaves her in a state of emotional upset, resulting in Myrtle's death later the same day. Myrtle is killed by Daisy, who is driving Gatsby's car. Upon finding out that Gatsby is the owner of the death car, Wilson assumes that it is Gatsby who has

murdered his wife. Wilson hunts down Gatsby and kills him. Gatsby becomes the victim of fire and the confusion of Myrtle's accident. Nick ends the climactic chapter with a reference to Gatsby's destruction by fire as he states, "the holocaust was complete" (p. 163).

All four of the elements are present in the description of Gatsby's death scene. A faint wind (air) disturbs the course of the mattress with its "accidental burden" on his swimming pool (water) (p. 162). Gatsby's idealistic dreams of reliving the past are betrayed by the gross reality of the reckless society of the East (earth), and his fiery destruction is the result of the carelessness and confusion of the "rotten crowd" with which he was involved (p. 154).

Gatsby's one true friend, Nick Carraway, serves as the narrator of The Great Gatsby. Nick is Fitzgerald's means of defining the novel's characters through numerous metaphorical descriptions. He is not representative of any one particular element; instead, he seems to have a balance of the qualities of air, earth, and water. Consequently, he serves as an intermediary who is on equal terms with all of the principle characters. Nick is not only one of the principal participants in the novel's action, but he is also an observer of human nature who interprets the actions of other characters and shares in their emotions. He is a realist who is able to penetrate the superficial appearances

to expose the corruptions and romantic desires of the people with which he is associated. Nick is the only representative of the middle-class in the novel, belonging to neither the drab, gray world of the Wilsons nor the white, sophisticated society of the Buchanans. His mid-western background has provided him with a moral instinct enabling him to judge people on their worth as individuals, not on their background.

Nick goes East to learn the bond business and to share in some of the "glamour" and sophistication. He is at first attracted by the charm and outward appearances of the Buchanans and Jordan Baker, but he eventually resents their carelessness and hypocrisy. Nick says, "I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (p. 36).

Early in the novel Nick is repulsed by Gatsby's vulgar, ostentatious display of wealth, but as the action progresses he becomes impressed by Gatsby's intense faith and loyalty to Daisy. Gatsby believes in himself, and he is determined to grasp his dream. Nick tries to get Gatsby to recognize the futility of his idealistic dream:

"I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past."
"Can't repeat the past?" [Gatsby] cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"
(p. 111)

Gatsby never realizes that his dream of Daisy is as illusive as the air with which she is characterized: " [Gatsby] stretched out his hand desperately as if to snatch only a wisp of air. . . ." (p. 153). In Nick's last conversation with him he compliments Gatsby, telling him that the Buchanans and their friends are a "rotten crowd" and that Gatsby is "worth the whole damn bunch" (p. 154). Nick believes that Gatsby is the only character who has a meaningful existence, even though he lives only to secure his illusion.

. . . there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promise of life . . . --it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. (p. 2)

Nick reveals a sympathetic reaction toward Gatsby's intense devotion to a dream, for he realizes that a romantic dreamer like Gatsby cannot survive in a world of brutal realists, such as Tom Buchanan who exist only to appease their appetites and are not misled by illusions. Ultimately, the element earth can be said to dominate the elemental structure of The Great Gatsby. Earth's most representative character, Tom Buchanan, emerges relatively unscathed: his selfishness and insensitivity make it possible for him to accept the loss of Myrtle without lasting pain, and except for Myrtle, he retains all that he had at the beginning of the summer. He, in fact, has

gained something; as a result of having observed the power of money, he has achieved additional justification for his arrogance.

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