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Visions of Blindness: Narrative Structures in *The Great Gatsby* and *Snow Falling on Cedars*

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F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1926) and David Guterson's *Snow Falling On Cedars* (1995) are both novels that thematise the act of murder. The narration that unravels the murderous events in each novel is complicated through the creation of perspectives that are essentially unstable. *The Great Gatsby* utilises Nick Carraway's singular narration as the primary though unreliable viewpoint to tell the story of Jay Gatsby and his adulterous and tragic affair with Daisy Buchanan on Long Island in New York City. This affair leads to the manslaughter of Tom Buchanan's mistress Myrtle Wilson, the murder of Jay Gatsby and the suicide of George Wilson. By contrast, *Snow Falling on Cedars* builds narrative through a set of multiple, fragmented perspectives, although the primary viewpoint belongs to the white journalist Ishmael Chambers. The narration is partly structured through the genre of courtroom drama in which the murder case involves a Japanese American, Kabuo Miyamoto, who has been accused of killing Carl Heine, a German American fisherman. Carl Heine's death by drowning would have been assumed to be an accident if not for the racist assumptions made by the detective and the Coroner, and by the close-knit and racially divided community of San Piedro Island. In each novel, the narrator is compelled to form a judgement regarding the accused, and in each novel the unequivocal location of blame in any one individual is made problematic. Both novels utilise gendered, racial, ethnic, and sexual stereotype as a way of exploring the themes of blame and judgement.

The narration in both *The Great Gatsby* and *Snow Falling on Cedars* undermines the power and efficacy of individual will and challenges the possibility of dispensing justice by emphasising that personal vision is necessarily subjective and

distorted. The notion of a single, coherent perspective is problematised as vision is also shown to be constructed by particular gendered, social and cultural conditions. Modern identity is found in both novels to be something that is partly arbitrary and partly fixed and this informs their interest in American identity as a history of crossings, of migration and colonisation. The island setting of both novels is of prime importance to this theme. If there is a controlling force in these narratives, it is to be found in the isolated and contained figure of the island and its dangerous exposure to the life-changing, elemental forces of nature.

Both novels are nevertheless interested in the power of personality and especially in the way in which individual consciousness, or ways of seeing, shape narrative. However, the meaning of personal or individual identity is influenced by and influences the meaning of other kinds of identity: national, cultural, racial and gendered. The meeting of the male protagonist in each novel with someone of a different gendered, social or cultural makeup, profoundly affects his journey and his destination. The theme of hybrid identity, a figure of mixture or crossing, enables an exploration of the nature of categorisation and judgement. Hybridity has often been the source of anxiety in twentieth-century American literature. This is evident in *The Great Gatsby* when Tom Buchanan vents his concerns about the rise of minority and mixed racial groups such as Jews and African-Americans. He comments that 'civilization's going to pieces … and that if we don't look out the white race will be utterly submerged.'[1] In Tom Buchanan's eyes, the growth of cultural and racial difference means the deterioration of an apparently pure white race. In *Snow Falling on Cedars*, personal (and especially sexual) contact with the racialised other becomes the means through which the protagonist experiences revelation and self knowledge. The white American Ishmael Chambers's doomed love for the beautiful Japanese American Hatsue at first clouds his judgement but then leads to his desire to find the truth of Carl Heine's death of which Hatsue's husband has been wrongly and prejudicially accused. As a state of in-betweenness, or a way of

being that problematises the nature of categorisation, hybrid identity becomes a figure for the necessary instability of human vision.

Nick Carraway is the first person narrator of *The Great Gatsby* who is aware of his position as reader and writer and who continually questions the accuracy of his observations and the validity of his judgement. Nick is an equivocal narrator who does not know whether 'conduct' should be founded on 'hard rock' or 'wet marshes' (p. 6). This undecidability is partly a result of the fact that the narration is self-consciously retrospective. In the opening chapter, Nick warns his reader:

> When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention for ever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. (p. 8)

This cautionary note which prefaces Nick's story makes certain that Nick's *uncertainty* as a reader and writer has affected and will affect the way in which his narrative is read. Nick's careful, tentative narration is one that oscillates between a desire for 'moral attention' and 'riotous excursion'. World War I looms in the background of this admission as Nick later discloses that he 'participated in that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War' and that he 'enjoyed the counter-raid so thoroughly' that he came back 'restless'. (p. 9) Nick's self-consciousness is directly thematised later in the novel when Nick again addresses his own position as both reader and writer: 'rereading over what I have written so far, I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that absorbed me.' (p. 62) As this revision suggests, Nick's narration is as much about withholding as dispensing information, especially those facts concerning his own life. Nick's autobiographical details are briefly summarised in the introductory paragraphs. Supporting Nick's assertion that he wanted no more 'riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart', is the fact that

there are only vague mentions of the broken-hearted girl that Nick has left behind in Ohio. Focussing on the 'riotous' and adulterous affairs of the Buchanans and Jay Gatsby, Nick occludes his own romance. For instance, his shortlived affair with Jordan Baker, during the tragic summer in New York, is mentioned only fleetingly.

In the opening paragraph, Nick prepares the reader for the way in which reticence will influence the narratorial perspective:

> In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I've been turning over in my mind ever since.
>
> 'Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone', he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had'. (p. 7)

By confessing his narratorial position of privilege and condescension, as 'advantage' is associated with class, pedigree, learning and stability, Nick also implies that he is disadvantaged by being too advantaged. The theme of class difference allows for a negotiation of high and low, old and new identities. Nick plays the part of the successful son who has a moral allegiance to his father, with whom he has always been 'unusually communicative in a reserved way'. As a character he therefore represents social and cultural stability through loyalty to his paternal lineage. This sets him in opposition to Jay Gatsby who has escaped his familial, social and cultural origins by anglicising his father's Jewish name 'Gatz' and reinventing himself in the East. It also puts in perspective Nick's detachment from the upwardly mobile and decadent social set he meets on Long Island. Nick and most of the people he encounters during the summer he spends in New York are immigrants. Like Tom and Daisy Buchanan, Nick has migrated from the Mid-West to the rapidly developing urban centre of New York in the East and he meets others, like Wolfshiem, Gatsby's Jewish business partner, who represent the influx of Eastern Europeans to America. Migration is seen

as being central to the personalities and events of the novel, as Nick observes at the end of the novel: 'this has been a story of the West . . . Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly adaptable to Eastern life.' (p. 160) Nick's crossing from West to East enables an exploration of such themes as individual reinvention, the breakdown of traditional values, and the apparent corrosion of class and cultural distinctions in the new cities of America. Social and cultural as well as geographical crossings are explored through Nick's narration of the decadent and solipsistic lifestyle of his wealthy neighbours, Jay Gatsby and the Buchanans. Gatsby's desire for and adulterous affair with Daisy Buchanan as well as Tom Buchanan's affair with the working class Myrtle Wilson plots the transgressive nature of individual will. The tragic accident, murder and suicide that end the novel happen partly as a result of these transgressions suggesting that illicit desire can only exist temporarily, as 'riotous excursions'.

The riotous human heart, it is implied, belongs not to the ostensibly conservative narrator but to Gatsby and the other members of the high society whom Nick encounters on Long Island. Nick's narrative is vicarious, it shies away from autobiography in order to tell the apparently more glamorous story of Jay Gatsby and his involvement with Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Nick confesses at the beginning of the narrative that 'the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions.' (p. 7) Nick intimates that his narrative, which is about Gatsby, 'the man who gives his name' to the book, is not necessarily his own and should not be taken at face value: it may be imitative or vicarious, lacking originality and authority.

The deceptive and unoriginal nature of surface appearances is of central importance to the novel and adds to the unreliability of Nick's narration. This treatment of the visual realm as something that is duplicitous also informs the construction of classed, gendered and ethnic stereotypes in the

novel. Reinforcing this is the characterisation of New York in the early twenties as a society that is flippant and trivial, governed by material, consumer concerns. New York and its high society is seen, in relation to the staid and unchanging Mid-West region from which Nick Carraway has migrated, as buoyant, diverse and mobile. The New Woman, or the flapper, especially seems to epitomise the floating superficiality of this age, having been let loose from traditional moorings and conventions. This is evoked in the following description of Nick's first encounter with his beautiful cousin Daisy Buchanan and her friend Jordan Baker:

> 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 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. 14)

The description of the young women hovering above the floor like balloons aligns the tenuous, instability of the age with the flightiness of women's new found liberal position. The nautical imagery, the woman are 'buoyed up' and 'anchored', as well as onomatopoeia, the 'groan' of the picture on the wall and the 'boom' of the shut window, evokes the theme of crossing and migration. The depiction of the women in a domestic setting which ultimately anchors them suggests the temporariness and limits of this mobility as a possible form of freedom.

There are vivid descriptions of the women, and later of Tom Buchanan and of Jay Gatsby, but there is no physical description of the narrator. This self-effacement suggests that, for Nick, the key to narration is disembodiment, especially when the surface appearance, as the floating image of Daisy and Jordan suggests, is found to be an unreliable indicator of the

real. Although there is no physical illustration of Nick, his tone is that of a sedate, reserved and dignified Mid-Westerner and these traits hinder as well as inform his judgement of others. The visible, or external appearance, is made suspect but also located as a key to narrative technique and as an inescapable part of modern, consumer society. When Nick observes that 'life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all' (p. 8) he describes his own position as the singular narrator of a story involving a complex web of personalities. 'Marred by obvious suppressions', the personal is not necessarily synonymous with the interior and it is no longer a valid register of sincerity. The 'single window' metaphor also alludes to the culture of surveillance that Nick sees as pervading the modern city. This surveillance is most vividly represented through the image of 'Dr T. J. Eckleberg', an oculist's advertisement which looks over the valley of ashes between West Egg and New York. This image is importantly faceless, it is all eyes: 'blue and gigantic–their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose.' (p. 29)

Nick's construction of his own careful, reticent nature is informed by his knowledge of the power of unreliable appearances. Reticence becomes a way of retreating from the drive to be a 'gorgeous' personality, such as Gatsby. Even though Jordan Baker tells him that she hates 'careless people. That's why I like you' (p. 65), Nick sees himself as lacking modern spontaneity and passion: 'I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires.' (p. 56) This metaphorisation of desire as an automobile combines with the novel's nautical imagery to produce individual will as a driven, mobile force. This driven human desire is characterised as a fatal blindness as exemplified in the plot through the tragic motorcar accident that kills Myrtle Wilson. Both Myrtle's death, as well as George Wilson's murder of Gatsby (who he is deceived into believing is responsible for his wife's death), happen partly as a result of mistaken identity and distorted vision.

It is Jay Gatsby, 'the man who gives his name' to the book, who is both located and displaced as the cause of this narrative uncertainty and blinded vision. The elegiac tone that begins the novel–the introductory conclusion that 'Gatsby turned out all right at the end' (p. 8)–implies that Gatsby is being blamed and exonerated at once. It is not clear until the end that the narrator's vindication of Gatsby is for the death of Myrtle Wilson. Apart from his involvement in this tragedy, Gatsby is cast as the 'gorgeous' personality who signifies a break with the past, but he is also implicated in what is wrong with the present. Unlike many of the other characters in the novel who are characterised, through the automobile and nautical imagery, as being driven rather than in control of their desires, Gatsby is 'related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away.' (p. 8) He is both sensitive and manipulative, able to control his own life and the lives of people around him.

In many ways, Gatsby derives his enigmatic power from his ability to transcend class strictures and cultural difference. He is a hybrid identity and this is the main cause of the suspicion surrounding him. Gatsby represents the power of the increasing wealth and influence of the self-made business man and celebrity, signifying the opposite of a Europeanized established, ruling class (which Nick Carraway represents). The rich and the famous frequent Gatsby's parties but are also seen as an anonymous and superficial mass who can be bought and acquired and also dispensed with. Gatsby's background is the subject of speculation and his claims of an Oxford education generally disputed. The source of Gatsby's wealth remains an enigma in the novel and is made to seem doubly underhanded through his association with Wolfshiem, a business connection and gambler. Wolfshiem is described as vain and sinister, as a 'flat-nosed Jew' with a 'large head' and 'tiny eyes' which rove around inspecting everything and everybody in the room (p. 75). Wolfshiem also symbolises the advent in modern America of the entrepreneurial business man and his expanding empire. This powerful type is seen as corrupting the notion of breeding and class status, as the narrator observes: 'It never occurred to

me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people–with the single mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe' (p. 80). This characterisation reflects the racist stereotype of Jews in the early twentieth century as greedy and acquisitive businessmen, desirous of power and wealth, who are rapidly becoming upwardly mobile and affecting the economic landscape. Gatsby's connection to Wolfshiem and other half-formed, enigmatic characters constructs him as a hybrid personality; on one hand Gatsby wants to claim a socially respectable, established background and on the other hand he is associated with new money. The new or the modern gets intertwined not only with the vulgarity of consumer culture and rampant capitalism but, through figures such as Wolfshiem, with the corrupt, the culturally mixed and the unpure.

The narration oscillates between locating blame with this unstable, entrepreneurial figure, and pointing to the unreliable nature of a singular perspective. Ultimately, fault is attributed not to a single man, that is Gatsby or the narrator, but to the narrator's inability to find a stable point of view. The final sentence of the novel returns to the figure of unstable desire via a nautical metaphor: 'So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.' (p. 188) Individual will is found to be no more powerful than boats on the endlessly mobile harbour, a force which is ultimately oblivious to human endeavour.

In David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars* the theme of cross-cultural identity is also prominent, most significantly through the presentation of the Japanese American characters Kabuo and Hatsue Miyamoto. Kabuo is on trial for the murder of Carl Heine who has been found dead, caught underwater in his own fishing net, with a wound to his head. The atrocities of the Second World War and the resonant tension between Japanese and Americans form the cultural and historical backdrop to the story as Guterson explores the racist stereotypes that inform American fears of alien cultures and the national desire to hold onto supremacy. The novel is set on San Piedro Island, situated off the north west coast of the United

States. Guterson introduces the setting by detailing the discovery of the Island in 1603 by Dutch explorers; this opening reminds the reader of the history of European settlement and provides a counterpoint to the *Angst* surrounding Japanese migration to the island in the mid-twentieth century.

Guterson sets out his interest in the history of colonisation and its effect on the colonised. He develops his views on this history through a popular genre, the crime novel or murder mystery. Guterson's fusion of a popular crime genre with a more serious quest narrative is also an example of hybridity. The novel begins with a quotation from Dante's *Divine Comedy,* an heroic male quest narrative. The central character Ishmael Chambers, the journalist who is in love with Hatsue Miyamoto the wife of the accused, has the same name as the narrator of the quintessential American quest narrative, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick.* Ishmael is not only the narrator of *Moby Dick,* he is also the character who meets a Polynesian man and embarks with him on a whaling voyage. In *Snow Falling on Cedars,* the theme of contact between coloniser and colonised is partly negotiated through a cross-cultural friendship. The accused Japanese American man, Kabuo, and the dead German American man, Carl, as the story unfolds turn out to have been old friends even though their families have been involved in a generational property dispute. It is this dispute over claims on territory that provides the motive for the murder. Through this friendship, Guterson explores a positive portrayal of cross-cultural communities. Guterson also thematises, as Fitzgerald does in *The Great Gatsby,* the issue of property, entrepreneurial gain, ownership and its relation to national identity.

The narration is structured through an objective and omniscient third person. The narrator, like the relatively unbiased character of Judge Llewellyn Fielding who presides over the murder case, has no direct involvement in the events of the novel but allows a hearing for the various testimonies from all the witnesses and then comes to a balanced judgement at the end. Through the courtroom drama genre, various characters take the part of narrators as they give their testimonies on their

involvement in the circumstances surrounding the alleged murder. This structure allows for a diverse series of broken stories which, when put together as a whole, form a picture of what may have taken place leading up to and on the night that Carl Heine died. Unlike the narration of *The Great Gatsby* which provides only one unreliable point of view, *Snow Falling on Cedars* presents a variety of narrative viewpoints. These perspectives are revealed to be informed by the social, cultural, racial, gendered positions of the various characters.

Multiple perspectives are drawn from a variety of class, ethnic, gendered and professional backgrounds and these different factors are seen to affect the way in which each witness views and tells his or her narrative. We are given the testimony of Art Moran, the county Sheriff; of Etta Heine,, the racist mother of the deceased; of the ostensibly scientific but obviously subjective view of the coroner Horace Whalley; and of the accused Kabuo and his wife Hatsue whose cultural differences set them physically and socially apart in the courtroom. Fear of cultural and racial difference informs a majority of the testimonies delivered in the courtroom. The most significant evidence in the case is that the wound to Carl Heine's head is assumed to have been made by a gun butt. The prejudice of the coroner, Horace Whalley (who has served in the Pacific war), clouds his supposedly objective inspection of the body when he tells the sheriff, Art Moran, that 'if he were inclined to play Sherlock Holmes he ought to start looking for a Jap with a bloody gun butt−a right handed Jap to be precise'.[2] Horace Whalley's position on Japanese immigrants is made clear through the derogatory term "Jap"; the facts surrounding Carl Heine's death are clouded from the beginning by cultural and racial assumptions. The characters involved in the murder case are also interested in playing the hero role. As Horace Whalley's comments about the sheriff's desire to be Sherlock Holmes suggest, Moran's detective work distorts the facts of the death and turns what was a boating accident into a racially motivated murder.

The description of the two central Japanese American characters plays with the importance of their external appearance in the formation of identity. The face of the cultural other becomes central to the notion of how a different culture is read, the surface is seen to construct the self and relays how the self is seen by others. Kabuo and Hatsue are clearly enigmas to the small community who live on San Piedro Island. Through these characters, Japanese culture is drawn as a disciplined, often severe and contained culture which values decorum and reticence. The narration frames this portrayal of Japanese culture as a personal, social and cultural construction. The opening of the novel depicts Kabuo's masked face as a form of protection and a feat of self control. The following passage introduces Kabuo through ethnic stereotyping and sets out the importance of cultural difference as a theme in the novel:

> The accused man, Kabuo Miyamoto, sat proudly upright with a rigid grace, his palms placed softly on the defendant's table–the posture of a man who has detached himself insofar as this is possible at his own trial. Some in the gallery would later say that his stillness suggested a disdain for the proceedings; others felt certain it veiled a fear of the verdict that was to come. Whichever it was, Kabuo showed nothing–not even a flicker of the eyes. He was dressed in a white shirt worn buttoned to the throat and grey, neatly pressed trousers. His figure, especially the neck and shoulders, communicated the impression of irrefutable physical strength and of precise, even imperial bearing. Kabuo's features were smooth and angular; his hair had been cropped close to his skull in a manner that made its musculature prominent. In the face of the charge that had been leveled against him he sat with his dark eyes trained straight ahead and did not appear moved at all. (p. 1)

This description of Kabuo's physical appearance is careful to delineate the difference between how Kabuo appears to be and how he actually is. The narration emphasises Kabuo's appearance as a kind of performance: 'Kabuo *showed* nothing', he '*communicated the impression*' and '*did not appear* moved at all'. This depiction of ethnic identity is as a performance, as something that is seen to be socially and culturally constructed and that can be enacted by the ethnic character himself. Unlike

the unequivocal depiction of the Jew Wolfshiem in *The Great Gatsby* as a character who possesses certain racial traits that determine his identity and his position in society, the presentation of Kabuo is of a character who is aware how he is being seen and of how he is being constructed by his audience.

The Japanese American is portrayed as maintaining a less rigid distinction between private and public, internal and external thoughts and impressions. In one scene in the novel, Kabuo sits alone in his prison cell and examines his reflection in the mirror. Unlike the accusers who watch him in court, Kabuo does not see himself as having self control. Importantly, also, his apparent reserve is seen to be an effect of his war-time experiences serving with the American side, rather than a result of Japanese enculturation:

> It was not a thing he had control over. His face had been molded by his experiences as a soldier, and he appeared to the world seized up inside precisely because this was how he felt. It was possible for him all these years later to think of the German boy dying on the hillside and to feel his own heart pound as it had as he squatted against the tree, drinking from his canteen. (p. 134)

Unlike Ishmael Chambers who also serves in and loses his arm to the war, Kabuo is able to look, face on, at the atrocities he has committed. In one part of the novel, Kabuo remembers putting the dying boy that he has shot out of misery: he ‘went forward with his rifle and squatted beside the German boy, on his right, and the boy put his hand on Kabuo’s boot and shut his eyes and gave out. The tension stayed in his mouth for a while, and Kabuo watched until it faded.’ (p. 134)

Japanese culture is thus explored through its differences from white American culture. One of the main themes is the different cultural attitude to modes of vision and blindness and the way in which this relates to cultural understandings of romantic love, attitudes to death and violence, and the difference of individual desire. Hatsue Miyamoto, the Japanese American girl Ishmael has loved since he was a boy, rejects her one-time attachment to him and looks at romantic love as a youthful

illusion. Through the figure of Hatsue, Japanese culture is presented as established, disciplined and rigid. All of the Japanese characters in the novel have a strong and committed family and work ethic as well as a strong tie to the land. However, the Japanese Americans are also depicted as having the same attachment to the island as the white Americans and as sharing, through Kabuo's patriotic service in the American army, national pride. Kabuo's patriotism as well as the depiction of the illicit childhood romance between the white American boy, Ishmael Chambers, and the Japanese American girl, Hatsue, explores the way in which personal desire can transgress, or cross, social and cultural conventions.

The narrative presents a retrospective account of Ishmael's infatuation with the Japanese girl. Ishmael thinks back to his encounters with her on the island when they were children as he watches her in the courtroom, a married woman supporting her accused husband. His portrait of her as a girl idealises and romanticises her beauty and femininity. The difference of her Japanese identity is also an important part of the attraction. Ishmael presents Hatsue as an exotic beauty who is at one with the island environment. His memory of her is a sensual one of her walking barefoot through the mudflats of the island. Natural and adept in this environment, Hatsue is depicted as having an organic and exotic attachment to the land and the sea. It is also a self-consciously voyeuristic narration: Ishmael remembers hiding in the woods and watching her at a distance as she hangs out washing. This narration is also aware of its own exoticisation and voyeuristic treatment of the Japanese. The voyeurism becomes most explicit at the end of the novel when, after Kabuo is acquitted, Ishmael takes a photo of Hatsue and Kabuo's embrace and watches their kiss 'through his viewfinder.' (p. 399)

The ultimate failure of the cross-cultural romance between Ishmael and Hatsue raises questions about the extent to which ethnic mixing is allowed to take place in the novel. Their teenage affair is broken up partly a result of social and political tensions. Hatsue and her family and the other Japanese residents

on the island are deported following the bombing of Pearl Harbour. The affair is, however, resisted by the Japanese girl when Hatsue realises that she cannot ultimately be united with the white boy because of cultural differences and because of the hidden nature of the relationship. The two lovers almost consummate their relationship in the hollow of a cedar tree, located in the heart of the forest, at the centre of the island. It is at this point that Hatsue experiences a revelation concerning her identity: she realises that she cannot ultimately be united with the white boy, as romantic love with a white boy is seen as being too separate from her family and cultural life. Hatsue's subsequent marriage to Kabuo implies her ultimate loyalty to her upbringing, her commitment to family values and her need to remain within her own community. Through Hatsue, Ishmael comes to terms with his own desires and frustrations and through her, he is motivated to discover and communicate the truth about Carl Heine's death. Hatsue is importantly positioned as the source of integrity, inspiration and justice but remains out of reach to the white boy. This characterisation of the Japanese woman utilises ethnicity to enable an exploration of cultural difference. It is, however, Ishmael who finally finds a path to self knowledge through contact with her.

The successful ties in the narrative are not so much between Japanese girl and white boy but between Japanese and white American men. The narrative is positive about the workability of a pluralist, multicultural American society and nation but presents problems for sexual relations and intermarriage between different cultures. Carl Heine and Kubuo resolve their differences despite family disputes and prejudice and the last word of the novel is for the Japanese man Kabuo, not the Japanese woman Hatsue.

Individual perspective is found to be partially determined by social, cultural and gendered constructions. However, as in *The Great Gatsby,* human vision is blocked by the larger impact of elemental forces. The snow that falls throughout the murder trial is thematised as something that distorts vision. It is also linked to Carl Heine's death, for it is the blinding fog that is

found to be the cause of the fisherman's accidental drowning. The snow is also metaphorically aligned with the Japanese American, Kabuo. Like the accused man, the snow is several times described as 'implacable' in the novel (p. 224). In the following description, the snow is a reminder of the contingency of human vision. It is necessarily unstable and vulnerable to factors such as the unpredictable wind that it can never hope to control:

> one's field of vision narrowed in close, went blurry and snowbound, fuzzy and opaque, the sharp scent of frost burned in the nostrils of those who ventured out of doors … When they looked out into the whiteness of the world the wind flung it sharply at their narrowed eyes and foreshortened their view of everything. (p. 149)

Such opacity is inevitable in both *Snow Falling on Cedars* and *The Great Gatsby* when their narrators attempt to extend their 'foreshortened … view'. The hesitant Nick Carraway believes that 'reserving judgements is a matter of infinite hope' (p. 7), while Ishmael Chambers argues that "the heart of any other, because it had a will, would remain forever mysterious." (p. 404) Like Nick Carraway, Ishmael is pictured as the writer of the story, but with a range of narratorial perspectives to draw on. *Snow Falling on Cedars* utilises a very different narrative technique from *The Great Gatsby.* It provides multiple perspectives rather than a single unreliable one. However, both novels revert to a single unattached male protagonist as the key perspective in the end. Ishmael sits at his typewriter, at the end of the novel, concerned with the blind and finally unknowable 'palpitations of Kabuo Miyamoto's heart' (p. 404). Like *The Great Gatsby, Snow Falling on Cedars* ends with the image of the singular male protagonist, the apparent victim of a failed romance. Both novels place this wilful but destabilised and blinded figure at the centre of narrative vision.

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[1] *The Great Gatsby* (1926; Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1950), p. 15. All subsequent references are to this edition of the novel and included parenthetically in the text.
[2] *Snow Falling on Cedars* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 52. All subsequent references are to this edition of the novel and included parenthetically in the text.

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