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Prefiguration Of Incidents In The Great Gatsby

John J. McNally

Among the many remarkable things in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is the author's deft handling of foreshadowing devices in the novel's first chapter. Indeed, almost every sentence of the chapter, either through irony, imagistic allusion, parallel incidents, or varied combinations of devices, adumbrates one or more incidents which are to function importantly later in the story. What follows here, is an examination of the first chapter of *The Great Gatsby* in an attempt to trace the threads of the chapter's fabric, as it were – to show in which specific ways Fitzgerald prepares the reader for the unfolding of the novel's larger design.

As the chapter opens, Nick Carraway, the novel's participant-narrator, tells the reader that for years he has been "turning over" in his head some advice his father had given him in his youth: " 'Whenever you feel like criticizing any one, ' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages you've had.' "

"He didn't say any more, but we've always been unusually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments . . ." (p. 1).

Besides helping to establish the narrator's objectivity, this passage forebodes significant events which later involve him. In each of these situations (with a notable exception to be taken up later)¹ Nick refrains from criticizing people. Not until he returns to the Middle West and begins to write his story does he realize that this tendency to reserve judgments stems from his father's advice.

The first of these events is Nick's reunion with his distant cousin Daisy and her husband Tom Buchanan, a former acquaintance of Nick's at Yale. It is quite obvious that Nick feels like criticizing the Buchanans on that very first visit to their mansion. For one thing, Nick discovers that Tom is obsessed with the notion of white supremacy, not because of any real conviction on his part but because he has been disturbed by a book. For another, Nick discovers that Tom keeps a mistress in New York City.

Through his conversation with Daisy that evening Nick learns that she has become very cynical about life and that she has not been very happy in her marriage to Tom. It is not surprising, then, that Nick leaves the Buchanans' house that night feeling "confused and a little disgusted" (p. 20). Despite his inclination to criticize his cousin and her husband, Nick for the first time in the novel reserves judgment.

In Chapter Two Nick again finds himself in a situation in which he feels like criticizing, but doesn't, perhaps because he subconsciously recalls his father's admonition. The events of this chapter take him through the valley of ashes into New York where he, Tom, and

Tom's mistress Myrtle entertain a shabby little group of people, and where Myrtle, a garage mechanic's wife, haughtily makes herself the center of attention. Myrtle's affected behavior and the inanities of the others at the party apparently disgust Nick, but rather than voice his criticism, he gets drunk.

In the next chapter Nick finally meets Gatsby and almost immediately feels like criticizing him. Of their first encounter Nick says that, despite the fact that Gatsby smiles "one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it" which "faced – or seemed to face – the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor," he is actually "an elegant young roughneck, a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd" (p. 48). Despite this mildly critical view of Gatsby, and despite rumors abroad at the party that Gatsby had once killed a man, Nick again reserves judgment, saying, in fact, that he "could see nothing sinister about him" (p. 50). Nick's ambivalence at this point in the novel is in itself a prefiguring of his final judgment that, although Gatsby "represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (p. 2), he still emerges as a person who is "worth the whole damned bunch put together" (p. 154).

Another incident which suggests Nick's recollection of his father's advice is the "disconcerting drive" Nick takes with Gatsby one morning in late July. Of that meeting and the conversations he has had with Gatsby in the previous month, Nick says that his first impression, that Gatsby "was a person of some undefined consequence, had gradually faded and he had become simply the proprietor of an elaborate roadhouse next door" (p.64). In the course of the conversation Gatsby begins to leave "his elegant sentences unfinished" and to slap himself on the knee as he reveals to Nick "God's truth" about his life (p. 65). He tells Nick that he is the son of wealthy parents in the Middle West and that he was educated at Oxford. Because Gatsby swallows or chokes on the phrase, "educated at Oxford," Nick begins to think that, perhaps, there is "something a little sinister about him, after all" (p. 65.) Then when Gatsby says that he had "lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe . . . collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little . . . , and trying to forget something very sad that happened to me long ago" (p. 66), Nick here, as in many other places in the novel, bites his tongue, as it were, and reserves judgment. In fact, after seeing a few more souvenirs of Gatsby's past – a medallion from the little country of Montenegro inscribed "'For valour Extraordinary'," and a photograph of Gatsby and five other young men taken in Trinity Quad – Nick concludes that "it was all true" and that "even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder" (p. 69).

Nick's meeting with the mysterious Meyer Wolfsheim is another situation during which he has occasion to recall his father's advice. Although he observes that Wolfsheim was a man who, in fixing the World Series, played "with the faith of fifty million people – with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe" (p. 74), Nick never mentions his unfavorable impressions to Gatsby.

In the conversation during which Gatsby tells him about "the way it was before" (P. 111), Nick again exercises the discretion his father had insisted upon: "... I gathered

that he wanted to recover some thing, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find what the thing was . . . ” (p. 112). Gatsby goes on to tell Nick that five years before he had kissed Daisy and that his heart had beat “faster and faster as Daisy’s white face came up to his own,” that he had known at the time that “when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God,” and that “at his lips’ touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete” (p. 112). Through all this, Nick is appalled by Gatsby’s sentimentality; nevertheless, he says nothing critical. This, despite the fact that “For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man’s, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air.” That this may be an example of the effect of his father’s admonition is suggested by his remark in the same paragraph that he “was reminded of something . . . that I had heard a long time ago” (p. 112).

Still another example of Nick’s forbearance foreshadowed by his remarks in Chapter One is his reaction to Tom’s interrogation of Gatsby early in the afternoon in the stifling heat of the Plaza hotel. Tom forces Gatsby to admit that he had spent only five months at Oxford, and implies that he knows Gatsby has been making love to Daisy. In fact, Nick tells the reader that he “was tempted to laugh whenever [Tom] opened his mouth. The transition from libertine to prig was so complete” (p. 130). Nevertheless, Nick once again refrains from criticizing.

After Myrtle’s death in the valley ashes, Nick is disturbed by Tom’s ability to dismiss the tragic affair with what Nick calls “a few brisk phrases” and by Jordan’s chilling indifference to the situation. Back at the Buchanans’ house both Tom and Jordan ask Nick to come inside for a while. Tom suggests that Nick and Jordan go into the kitchen to order some supper, and Jordan reminds him that “it’s only half-past nine.” Though Nick tells the reader that “I’d be damned if I’d go in; I’d had enough of them for one day, . . . Jordan too,” his only remark at the time is “No, thanks. But I’d be glad if you’d order me the taxi. I’ll wait outside” (p. 143).

A few minutes later Nick encounters Gatsby and asks him what he is doing in the garden. “Just standing here, old sport,” is Gatsby’s reply. Recalling the encounter, Nick says: “Somehow that seemed a despicable occupation. For all I knew he was going to rob the house in a moment; I wouldn’t have been surprised to see sinister faces, the faces of ‘Wolfsheim’s people,’ behind him in the dark shrubbery” (p. 144). Then, after Gatsby ascertains that Myrtle was killed and informs Nick that he thought he had made a safe getaway, Nick asks him how it happened. When Gatsby blurts, “Well, I tried to swing the wheel,” Nick suddenly guesses at the truth – that Daisy was driving the car – and his faith in Gatsby’s integrity is at least partially restored. At any rate, he says nothing critical to Gatsby.

Nick seems to recall his father’s advice again in his final conversation with Gatsby. Nick has already missed two trains in order to stay with Gatsby on what is to be Gatsby’s last afternoon alive. Finally, after assuring Gatsby that he will call him from work about

noon, Nick takes his leave, but not before “remember [ing] something” which makes him shout across the lawn to Gatsby: “‘They’re a rotten crowd . . . You’re worth the whole damned bunch put together.’”

“I’ve always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end” (p. 154). If that “remembered something” is the elder Mr. Carraway’s advice, what Nick says next is evidence that here, for the first time in the novel, Nick takes the advice to its logical conclusion. Having been told by now the whole story of Gatsby’s strange life, Nick can fully appreciate that Gatsby has not had all the advantages that he has had. Consequently, Nick is able not only to refrain from criticizing Gatsby but also to let him know that, although he cannot condone the man’s means of achieving his goal, he can at least let him know that he finds in him some inexplicable quality lacking in the others. Nick prepares for this unusual application of his father’s advice in Chapter One when after recalling the older Carraway’s admonition, he says, “‘I understood that he meant a great deal more than that’” (p. 1).

From this point on Nick finds himself “on Gatsby’s side, and alone” (p. 165). Nevertheless, in his last few contacts with the other characters in the story, he still reserves judgment. When Klipspringer calls, for instance, and Nick fails to get him to attend Gatsby’s funeral, he refrains once again from being openly critical. Impatient with “‘the boarder’s’” feeble excuses, Nick comes close to voicing his anger; instead he utters an unrestrained “‘Huh!’” (p. 170) and simply hangs up the phone receiver. Later, on the morning of the funeral Nick goes to see Wolfsheim in New York, hoping desperately to get him to the funeral. Like Klipspringer, Wolfsheim decides “not to get mixed up in it” (p. 173). When it becomes apparent that Wolfsheim “for some reason of his own was determined not to come” (p. 173), Nick, despite his anger and frustration, says nothing. He simply accepts the man’s handshake and leaves his office.

At the funeral, Nick remembers “without resentment” that Daisy has not “sent a message or a flower” (p. 176). Something in Nick’s background has made him capable of understanding that, despite their wealth, some people are unable to feel the real concern for others that seems so natural and automatic in families like his, back in “the warm center of the world” (p. 3).

Perhaps the most difficult test of his father’s advice confronts Nick when he decides to see Jordan one more time before returning to the Middle West. In this encounter, two opportunities to criticize her occur. First, she tells him that she is engaged to another man. He doubts her – “though there were several she could have married at a nod of her head” (p. 178) – and pretends to be surprised. He has known all along that Jordan is a consummate liar, so there seems to be no need to lash out at her for it. Next, in a final effort to taunt him, she reminds him of their conversation about being careless drivers.

“‘You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn’t I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride.’”

“‘I’m thirty,’ [Nick says]. ‘I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor’” (p. 179).

Jordan makes no comment, and Nick, "angry, . . . half in love with her, and tremendously sorry" (p. 179) turns away without a word. His criticism of her will have to wait until he returns to the Middle West and writes his story.

The final occasion Nick has to apply his father's advice is his chance meeting with Tom Buchanan one afternoon later in October. It is at this time that Nick verifies his suspicion that it had been Tom who told Wilson where to find Gatsby:

"Tom," I inquired, 'what did you say to Wilson that afternoon?'

"He stared at me without a word, and I knew that I had guessed right about those missing hours. I started to turn away, but he took a step after me and grabbed my arm.

". . . 'What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one. He ran over Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car.'

"There was nothing I could say except the one unutterable fact that it wasn't true . . ." (p. 180).

Nick goes on to say that he couldn't forgive or like Tom, but that he could see that "what he had done was to him entirely justified" (p. 180). And although Nick has every reason to criticize Tom and Daisy for being "careless people . . . who smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness" (p. 180), he simply shakes hands with Tom, because, he says, "it seemed silly not to, for I suddenly felt as though I were talking to a child" (p. 181). In trying to show that this, like the situations already mentioned, is an echo of Nick's father's advice, it is essential to point out that Nick says that Tom goes into a jewelry store, rid of Nick's "provincial squeamishness forever" (p. 181). His "provincial squeamishness" is, like his ability to reserve judgments, inextricably linked to his "younger and more vulnerable years" when his father gave him that bit of advice that he has been turning over in his head ever since.

Of all the things that might have transpired between father and son, this remark is the one which comes to Nick's mind as he sits down to relate the events he has lived through in the summer of 1922. And while it is an effective means of preparing the reader for specific events which envelope Nick, it also foreshadows Nick's reliance on traditional midwestern mores when called upon to make value judgments in the story and his eventual return to the "hard rock" of the Middle West, older and less vulnerable than he was when the advice was proffered.

Moreover, other passages besides the "advice passage" in the first chapter foreshadow incidents, important and minor. For example, Nick sets the stage for several of the story's key scenes when he observes in Chapter One that: "The abnormal mind is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality [of reserving judgments] when it appears in a normal person, and so it came about in college that I was unjustly accused of being a politician, because I was privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men" (p. 1).

The first of these is played out at Gatsby's initial summer party at which the host is several times "unjustly accused." Jordan and two other girls are talking quite confidentially when one girl says:

"Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once."

“ ‘I don’t think it’s so much *that*,’ argued Lucille skeptically; ‘it’s more that he was a German spy during the war.’

“One of the men nodded in confirmation.

“ ‘I heard that from a man who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany,’ he assured us positively.

“ ‘Oh, no,’ said the first girl, ‘it couldn’t be that, because he was in the American army during the war.’ As our credulity switched back to her, she leaned forward with enthusiasm. ‘You look at him sometimes when he thinks nobody is looking at him. I’ll bet he killed a man’ (p.44).”

The second scene unfolds later at the same party when Gatsby, to Nick (and the reader) “ a wild unknown man” at this point, makes his first overt attempt to establish contact with Daisy. He confers secretly with Jordan Baker, telling her the fantastic story of his “secret grief.” Finding out later that Nick and Jordan plan to lunch together in New York, Gatsby arranges for Jordan to reveal his five-year-old secret grief to Nick and to suggest that Nick invite Daisy to his house for a “chance” meeting with Gatsby.

Still other scenes are presaged by the phrase “privy to the secret griefs of wild, unknown men.” Nick’s ride into New York in Gatsby’s gorgeous car, for instance, provides Gatsby the opportunity to share with Nick more of his secrets:

“ ‘Well, I’m going to tell you something about my life . . . I don’t want you to get a wrong idea of me from all those stories you hear’ ” (p. 65).

The tone of Gatsby’s remark is obviously confessional and intended to refute his guests’ unjust accusations of him. That Gatsby’s revelations about his parents, education, and travels (pp. 65-66) are lies, or, at best, half truths permits him not only to deny the unjust or inaccurate accusations by substituting more preposterous untruths, but also to prepare Nick psychologically for the role of secret-sharer. That Gatsby chose to reveal to Nick the details of his background should remind the reader that, “The abnormal mind [like Gatsby’s] is quick to detect and attach itself to this quality [of reserving judgments] when it appears in a normal person . . . ” (p. 1).

The first six words of the next sentence in Chapter One strongly suggest those frequent occasions in the novel when Nick becomes inadvertently involved in the problems of other characters. “Most of the confidences were unsought,” he says, preparing the way for numerous confidences later tendered him: that Tom has a mistress in New York City, that Daisy has become very cynical about life, that he is to act as liaison between Gatsby and Daisy, that George McKee would like to expand his photography business, that Jay Gatsby is the assumed name of James Gatz, that one of Gatsby’s friends – Meyer Wolfsheim –had fixed the World Series in 1919.

The rest of the foreboding sentence mentioned above abounds in suggestive details: “ – frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelation of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions” (p. 1). The words, “I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon,”

adumbrates the ceremonial scene at the end of the first chapter – the scene in which Gatsby, his arms outstretched and quivering, stares across the water at the green light – his unmistakable sign for Daisy – on the horizon. Although the tone of the prefiguring passage is radically different from the tone of the “green light” episode, it is, nevertheless, highly implicative because of the accumulation of such evocative words and phrases as “unmistakable signs,” “intimate revelation,” “quivering,” and “on the horizon.” The green light scene is, in itself, another hint of Gatsby’s intimate revelations which are shortly to follow in the novel.

The next part of the sentence – “the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions” – points ahead to a conversation between Nick and Tom Buchanan in which Tom reveals his anxiety over the possibility that the white race will be “utterly submerged” (p. 13). Tom’s phrase (“utterly submerged”) he has apparently borrowed, along with his concern, from a book called *The Rise of the Colored Empires*. The tenor of Tom’s complaints and Daisy’s reactions to him at the time indicate that the whole conversation is “marred by obvious suppressions.”

When Nick says – still in the so-called “prologue” – that “. . . Conduct may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes, but after a certain point, I don’t care what it’s founded on” (p. 2), he prepares the reader for the many incidences of misconduct, especially the spectacular parties at Gatsby’s which he is to encounter and which are to force him to retreat to the Middle West. Although Nick says that “after a certain point I don’t care what . . . [conduct] is founded on,” the fact that he does return to the Middle West makes it apparent that he is more confident of finding the kind of conduct he approves of back in the hard rock of the continent’s midsection than in the wet marshes of its East coast.

Similarly, Nick sets the stage for several key incidents later in the story when he remarks: “. . . last autumn I felt 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” (p. 2). One of these is his “disconcerting ride” into New York City during which “with fenders spread like wings,” (p. 68) he and Gatsby speed “through half Astoria” just after Gatsby has given Nick a “privileged glimpse” into his past. Another is the ride Nick takes with Jordan and Tom (in Gatsby’s car as Gatsby and Daisy ride ahead of them in the Buchanans’ coupe) into New York. Describing this “riotous excursion” – the five of them are going to New York to drink away the afternoon – Nick again indicates his singular insight into Tom’s troubled mind. “There is no confusion like the confusion of a simple mind,” Nick says, “. . . 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. Instinct made him step on the accelerator with the double purpose of overtaking Daisy and leaving Wilson behind, and we sped along toward Astoria at fifty miles an hour . . .” (p. 125). Nick is able to interpret Tom’s feelings at this time because earlier in the novel Tom has permitted him to know about his affair with Myrtle – another “privileged glimpse.”

The last and most vivid incidence of Nick's "riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart" is, of course, the return trip from New York City which culminates in Myrtle Wilson's horrible death.

"The 'death car' as the newspapers called it, didn't stop; it came out of the gathering darkness; wavered tragically for a moment, and then disappeared around the next bend . . .

". . . when they had torn open her shirtwaist still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath . . ." (p. 138).

Here Fitzgerald provides the reader with the horribly graphic sight of Myrtle's physical heart — a glimpse which, because it symbolizes what happens when careless people have their way, underscores Nick's desire not to become involved with such people again.

Of all the evocative sentences and phrases in the two-page "prologue" to the novel, one of the most pregnant with forebodings is the following: "No — Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive elations of men" (p. 2). Not only does "foul dust" suggest one of the novel's major settings, the valley of ashes, and "floated in the wake" link with later references to boats and water, but the passage predicts Gatsby's death and his ultimate realization that his incorruptible dream is futile. Ironically, Nick says that "Gatsby turned out all right at the end," meaning, of course, not that Gatsby lives "happily ever after," but that in no longer expecting Daisy's phone call he "must have felt that . . . he had paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" (p. 162). Lest the first part of the prefigurement be criticized for cheating the reader by leading him to expect a typical romantic happy ending, Fitzgerald has Nick refer to the "foul dust" which "floated in the wake of his dreams." The "foul dust" and the "wake" are terms which connote death; the verb "floated" even suggests the setting for Gatsby's death, since he does, after all, die floating on the surface of his swimming pool.

The prefigurings discussed so far in this paper have all appeared in the first two pages — the "prologue" of *The Great Gatsby*. Throughout the rest of the first chapter, Fitzgerald provides additional "arrows" to point the reader toward subsequent plot developments.

Nick's early remarks about the Buchanans point toward several significant moves they will make later in the novel. For example, Nick points to Daisy and Tom's return to the Middle West after Myrtle's death when he observes: "Why they came East, I don't know. 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" (p. 6). Nick's remark later in the novel about a different kind of retreat embodies a similar idea: ". . . They were careless people, Tom and Daisy — they smashed up things and creatures and then

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 . . . ” (pp. 180-181).

Nick’s observation that Tom has “a body capable of enormous leverage – a cruel body” (p. 7), not only strengthens his earlier impression of a man “seeking . . . for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game” but also foreshadows the bloody scene in the next chapter in which Tom “making a short deft movement” (a straightarm?) breaks Myrtle’s nose “with his open hand” (p. 37). Nick’s descriptions of Tom also prepare the reader for the scene toward the end of the novel in which Nick sees Tom for the last time: “One afternoon late in October [football season] I saw Tom Buchanan. He was walking ahead of me on Fifth avenue in his alert, aggressive way, his hands out a little from his body as if to fight off interference, his head moving sharply here and there, adapting itself to his restless eyes . . . ” (p. 179).²

In this latter scene Nick lets Tom know how he feels about him since the “accident.” Defiantly defending his telling Wilson where to find Gatsby, Tom resorts automatically to the jargon of the football field: “‘What if I did tell him? That fellow [Gatsby] had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy’s, but he was a tough one . . . ’” (p. 180).

There are several apparently trivial incidents in the first chapter which parallel more important incidents later in the novel. Daisy’s and Jordan’s lolling around drinking cocktails with Tom and Nick and wondering what exciting things to do is followed later in the novel by an almost identical scene in Chapter Seven. In the former scene at the Buchanans’, Jordan says “‘I’m stiff . . . I’ve been lying on that sofa for as long as I can remember,’” to which Daisy retorts “‘Don’t look at me . . . I’ve been trying to get you to go to New York all afternoon.’” In the latter, also at the Buchanans’, Daisy asks “‘What’ll we do with ourselves this afternoon? . . . and the day after that, and the next thirty years?’”

“‘Don’t be morbid’ Jordan said. ‘Life starts all over again when it gets crisp in the fall.’

“‘But it’s so hot,’ insisted Daisy, on the verge of tears, ‘and everything’s so confused. Let’s all go to town’ ” (p. 118).

The effect in this particular pairing of scenes is to have the first inconsequential one prepare the reader for the very important second one which leads eventually to the exciting motor trip after which Daisy kills Myrtle.

The butler’s calling Tom away from the conversation in Chapter One is counterpointed several times later in the novel when Gatsby’s butler calls him away from his guests. In Tom’s case, as in Gatsby’s, the butler’s interruption takes the host away to his contact with his sub-rosa world. Tom’s telephone call comes from his mistress, Gatsby’s from his friends in the rackets.

Daisy hints unknowingly at several key situations which develop later when in Chapter One she implores: “‘Come over often Nick, and I’ll sort of – oh – fling you together. You know – lock you up accidentally in linen closets and push you out to sea in a boat,

and all that sort of thing' ” (p. 19). It is especially ironic that although Daisy plans to pair up Jordan and Nick they instead become instrumental in bringing together Daisy and Gatsby. Of course, her remark does prefigure the eventual near-romantic relationship between Nick and Jordan. This, too, is ironic since Daisy plans to lock the two in linen closets “accidentally,” a phrase which hints subtly at their subsequent discussion of their relationship in terms of “careless drivers.” The most distinct echo of Daisy’s little joke, though, is one of her own speeches to Gatsby in Chapter Five: “‘Look at that,’ she whispered and then after a moment: ‘I’d just like to get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around’ ” (p. 95). In Chapter One Daisy’s remark is devoid of real emotion; she is merely being cute. In its counterpart later in the novel, Daisy has been flung together with Gatsby – not at all accidentally – and has been quite moved by Gatsby’s pathetic romantic devotion. In her own way, she means it this time.

One brief exchange of remarks in the first chapter not only points ahead to Daisy’s re-involvement with Gatsby but also provides evidence of her previous relationship with him. After Nick observes that he has seen Jordan somewhere before, Jordan remarks contemptuously:

“‘You live in West Egg . . . I know somebody there.’

“‘I don’t know a single —’

“‘You must know Gatsby.’

“‘Gatsby?’ demanded Daisy. ‘What Gatsby?’ ” (p. 11).

Daisy’s intense interest – she *demands* to know “What Gatsby?” – strongly hints that she knows of at least one Gatsby. This hint is complemented by Nick’s description of Gatsby at the very end of the chapter: “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” (pp. 21). Besides making reference to the green light, which as it turns out is the light at the end of Daisy’s dock, the description parallels scenes involving Gatsby and Daisy which appear later in the novel. Speaking with Jordan Baker in Chapter Four about the approaching reunion of Gatsby with Daisy, Nick observes the strong coincidence of Gatsby’s living just across the sound from the Buchanans.

“‘But it wasn’t a coincidence at all,’ [replied Jordan].

“‘Why not?’

“‘Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay.’

“Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor” (p. 79).

This latter passage makes clear the reason for Gatsby’s trembling in the former, and marks the point at which his mysterious neighbor becomes real to him.

The next scene recalling Nick’s first view of Gatsby occurs in Chapter Five. In this scene Daisy and Gatsby have finally come together and the two of them are standing side by side looking out the window across the sound.

“‘If it wasn’t for the mist we could see your home across the bay,’ said Gatsby.

“‘You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock’ ” (p. 94).

McNally: Prefiguration of Incidents in 'The Great Gatsby'

Gatsby should know, since, as Nick suggests in Chapter One, he frequently keeps solitary vigil on his lawn looking across the sound toward Daisy.

Nick's initial reference to Gatsby and his green light forebodes one final incident in the novel – Nick's meditation as he lay on Gatsby's beach:

“. . . I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in the vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night” (p. 182).

The echoes here of the reader's first image of Gatsby are clear: there is the green light at the end of Daisy's deck, there is the reminder of Gatsby's reaching for the light (“he could hardly fail to grasp it”) and there is the reference to the night sky. Although in Chapter One Nick merely observes Gatsby's ceremony, he and his readers join in his meditation upon Gatsby's incorruptible dream when he says:

“It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . ” (p. 182).

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F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. The Scribner Library (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

¹ See last paragraph, p. 41; first paragraph, p. 42.

² It is typical of Fitzgerald's method of characterization that a person's physical qualities generally parallel his spiritual condition: e.g., Tom's physical aggressiveness parallels his moral callousness.

