On Imagination and Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*

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**On The Great Gatsby** by F. Scott Fitzgerald  
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In his third novel, Fitzgerald continues the practice of using the car to characterize. As Malcolm Cowley points out, the characters are visibly represented by the cars they drive; Nick has a conservative old Dodge, the Buchanans, too rich for ostentation, have an "easy-going blue coupé," while Gatsby’s car is a "rich cream color, bright with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns"—it is West Egg on wheels.

Gatsby's car is an adolescent's dream, the very vehicle for one who formed his ideals as a teenager and never questioned them again. Gatsby is not sufficiently creative to choose a truly unique machine, so he selects a copy of the gaudy dream car spun from the lowest common denominator of intelligence and imagination. Such a car is exactly what an artist might fashion if he were third-rate specifically because he has plagiarized from the common American dream; because he has seen no need for originality; because he has failed to distinguish between romance and reality. Just as Gatsby—part the shadowy gangster who made millions, part the man who could remain faithful to an ideal love for five years—is an odd mixture of pragmatist and romantic, so his car blends colors representing both traits. It is a rich cream color, a combination of the white of the dream and the yellow of money, of reality in a narrow sense. After Myrtle Wilson's death, a witness to the accident describes the car as just plain yellow, which, as color imagery unfolds, becomes purely and simply corruption. White, the color of the dream, has been removed from the mixture. Only the corruption, the foul dust, remains of Gatsby's dream after that hot day in New York. Thus the car becomes one external symbol of Gatsby, his mind, and what happens to his dream.

Even minor characters absorb traits from the vehicles associated with them. Myrtle, who meets Tom on a train and rides to their trysting place in a cab, must depend on others for transportation. With a single brushstroke—one of these taxi rides—Fitzgerald sketches Myrtle: she "let four taxicabs drive away before she selected a new one, lavender-colored with gray upholstery." This choice, worthy of Gatsby, coincides perfectly with the conduct of a woman who would ask, vulgarly cute, whether the dog is a "boy or a girl" (p. 28), who would display McKee's inept photographs on her walls, and who would have "several old copies of *Town Tattle* ... on the table together with a copy of *Simon Called Peter*, and some of the small scandal magazines of Broadway" (p. 29).

Jordan Baker, too, is characterized by her association with cars. Through her handling and driving of them, she reveals herself as a careless person. Nick does not recall the story that she cheated during a golf tournament until she leaves a "borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, and then lied about it" (p. 58). As for her driving, "she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat" (p. 59). As Nick says, she is a "rotten driver" fully capable of causing a fatal accident if ever she meets someone as careless as herself (p. 59). She smashes things, as do most careless people. The pattern is plain; recklessness behind the wheel (at first humorous in the Owl Eyes scene) deepens to near tragic proportions when it claims the lives of the Wilsons and Gatsby. Neither Nick nor the reader can trust a careless driver. Perhaps even Nick is careless. He does not deny it when Jordan accuses him of being a bad driver.
The essential point, however, is that Nick has become considerably more human. No longer the man to make an extravagant claim to honesty, he does not try to defend himself against the charge of careless driving.

Always a characterizing device in *The Great Gatsby*, the car soon develops into a symbol of death. Fitzgerald begins to establish this pattern at the end of Gatsby's party. As the mass of cars leave, a dozen headlights illuminated a bizarre and tumultuous scene. In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of one wheel, rested a new coupé.... The sharp jut of a wall accounted for the detachment of the wheel, which was now getting considerable attention from a half dozen curious chauffeurs. However, as they left their cars blocking the road, a harsh, discordant dun from those in the rear had been audible for some time and added to the already violent confusion of the scene. (p. 54)

Carelessness plus cars equal chaos, and although the scene with Owl Eyes—who correctly protests that he knows little about driving and that he was not even trying to drive—is a highlight of humor in the novel, it suggests the possibility of an accident, even a fatality, if a car is placed in the hands of a careless person. This scene is designed to establish the pattern, to prepare the reader for Myrtle's death.

Tom's first experiment with infidelity continues the pattern of careless drivers leading careless lives and reinforces the image of the amputated wheel:

Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken—she was one of the chamber maids in the Santa Barbara hotel. (p. 78)

This second accident adds another element to the symbol. Not only is the possibility of injury or death linked with careless drivers, but infidelity suddenly becomes part of the pattern.

Even here, though, where automobile imagery increasingly symbolizes death, Nick finds taxis a part of the very breath and music of New York:

When the dark lanes of the Forties were lined five deep with throbbing taxicabs, for the theater district, I felt a sinking in my heart. Forms leaned together in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes.... Imagining that I, too, was hurrying toward gayety and sharing their intimate excitement, I wished them well. (p. 58)

Cars, in addition to dealing death, have the more normal function of carrying people to excitement, or to other destinations. Only the driver defines the car.

Viewing automobile imagery from a different perspective, it is significant that Wilson should deal in cars on the edge of the valley of ashes. Like the automobile, he gradually becomes both symbol and instrument of death. As Nick points out, "the only car visible [in Wilson's lot] was the dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner" (p. 25). The valley of ashes is the valley of death where everything is dead or dying.

To make sure the reader catches the symbolic significance of the automobile, Fitzgerald, in one master stroke, associates both cars and water with death. As Nick rides with Gatsby over the Queensboro Bridge, they meet a funeral procession: Nick is glad that "the sight of Gatsby's splendid car was included in [the mourners'] somber holiday" (p. 69). To draw attention to this funeral procession and to its importance in the fabric of the novel, Fitzgerald introduces it with the singular, somewhat bizarre phrase: "A dead man passed us in a hearse heaped with blooms ..." (p. 69).
With everything set up to create expectations of disaster whenever a car appears, the accident that kills Myrtle seems inevitable, not the very strange coincidence it really is. Image patterns have made it possible for Fitzgerald to use an unlikely series of events and to make them seem natural. He has led us carefully to the moment when Myrtle lies dead, one breast amputated like the amputated front wheels in earlier scenes.

Temporarily shaken by the loss of his mistress—even though he has just regained his wife—Tom soon recovers and reverts to type. Leaving Myrtle dead in ashes, Tom "drove slowly until we were beyond the bend—then his foot came down hard, and the coupé raced along through the night" (p. 142). Where caution is seemly, Tom pretends to practice it, but away from the public eye, he speeds up, becomes again the fast driver who broke a girl's arm and sheared off the wheel of his car in an earlier accident. This violent event fails to alter Tom; the pattern of carelessness will continue, and Tom will drive on, harming but unharmed.

To cap off the automobile symbolism, Fitzgerald makes all cars become the death car to Michaelis, who spends the night watching Wilson. Whenever a car goes "roaring up the road outside it sounded to him like the car that hadn't stopped a few hours before" (p. 157). And it is symbolically right that the car, even though it has served its purpose in killing Myrtle, should continue to be an image of death. With Myrtle dead, two still remain to die: Wilson and Gatsby. Gatsby's car, symbol of death, of a tarnished dream, leads them all to the grave.

One first notes that The Great Gatsby is built around East Egg, West Egg, and the Valley of Ashes, all of which are characterized in terms of light. A fourth setting, New York, appears less vividly in terms of light, although a harsh sun often gleams there. The preponderance of light imagery establishes The Great Gatsby as a "novel about seeing and misseeing." Few characters see clearly. Nick, proclaiming himself honesty's model, sees himself but dimly. Only Owl Eyes dons enormous spectacles to correct his vision:

Despite his imperfection as a seer (like the other guests, he is drunk), this man is able to look through the facade of Gatsby and all he stands for, and, just as important, he is able to see that there is substance behind the facade.

Owl Eyes views Gatsby only from the outside, yet he makes the most telling pronouncement—"The poor son of a bitch" (p. 176). He sees Gatsby as a human being, a man deserving decent burial. Nick sees more, enough to speak a volume, but Owl Eyes cuts quickly to the essence, the humanity.

In a novel where everyone more or less has an opportunity to see, total darkness is rare. Darkness dots play one important role, however; when Gatsby returns home after his all-night vigil at Daisy's window, he and Nick spend the black morning in Gatsby's house: "We pushed aside curtains that were like pavilions, and felt over innumerable feet of dark wall for electric light switches" (p. 147). Apparently they find no light switches because Nick says, "throwing open the French windows of the drawing-room, we sat smoking out into the darkness" (p. 147). Clearly, this is ritual; on this dark night, Nick and Gatsby form a human bond, and Gatsby, for the first time, talks unreservedly about himself. In light—sun, moon, artificial—they form no such friendship. Like King Lear, who sees only after enduring the black night of madness, like Gloucester, who understands only after Cornwell hops his eyes to dead jelly, like Oedipus, who comprehends only after he has gouged out his own eyes, Gatsby and Nick can see one another only in darkness. Perhaps their relationship could not survive the light of day; a better conclusion, considering Fitzgerald's penchant for ironically twisting symbols, is that darkness offers a more realistic picture than light does. Gatsby must become himself because the dark hides his gorgeous suit, his
magnificent house, his fabulous car. Gatsby stands as if naked in the dark, and he comes off pretty well. Without his absurd trappings, he is enough of a human being to force the fanatically cautious Nick into a human commitment, something no one else has done.

Just as Nick and Gatsby wait together in darkness on the night of Myrtle's death, Michaelis and George Wilson maintain a vigil in the "dull light" of the garage. At dawn they snap off the light that all through the night has been bombarded by beetles. Wilson looks out over the valley of ashes, not upon the dew and stirring birds as did Nick and Gatsby, but upon the dead eyes of T.J. Eckleburg. Astonished, Michaelis watches as Wilson reveals that he worships Eckleburg as a god. The contrast between the blue-gray dawn of the wasteland and the gold-turning dawn of West Egg is genuine this time, not just apparent. Both Nick and Wilson make commitments in that dawn—Nick to another human being, to life, and Wilson to a gaudy graven image, to death. His commitment is natural in a place where even dawn is described as twilight (p. 160).

Moonlight, which often pierces the night, is a more prevalent image than total darkness in The Great Gatsby. The moon in earlier novels symbolized romance; it shed a light that made palatable the harshest realities. Not here, though. The moon becomes the sinister light of nightmare, although it is innocent enough in the beginning of the novel. On the way home from the Buchanans' in chapter 1, for example, Nick notes the brightness of the summer night and the red gas pumps in pools of light in front of the stations. On this night, which teems with life beneath moonlight, Nick sees Gatsby "standing with his hands in his pockets regarding the silver pepper of the stars" (p. 21). Or so Nick thinks. Gatsby sees no stars—natural if romantic lights—but worships the artificial green light at the end of Daisy's dock.

During Gatsby's first party, the moon enhances the atmosphere of unreality. As evening blurs into morning and the moon rises, Nick finds "floating in the sound ... a triangle of silver scales, trembling a little to the stiff, tinny drip of the banjoes on the lawn" (p. 47). Here even nature—in the form of the moon—cooperates to stagelight the production which is Gatsby's party. Nick suggests that Gatsby's power is such that he can dispense "starlight to casual moths" (p. 80). Moonlight at this point still epitomizes romance. The birth of Jay Gatsby and simultaneous departure of James Gatz occurs under a fantastic moon image. A dream is born; Nick describes the labor pains that bring forth romance:

A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the washstand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor. (pp. 99–100)

A romantic adolescent gives birth to a dream. That dream never grows, never changes.

Gatsby's dream, however, suffers a blow in the moonlight when Daisy disapproves of the party. The death of Myrtle then sends it reeling, and suddenly the moon is no longer the fabric from which dreams are spun. The moon becomes associated with the grotesque after Myrtle's death: Tom, Nick, and Jordan return from New York, "the Buchanans' house floated suddenly toward us through the rustling trees" (p. 142). Tom becomes callous, decisive in the moonlight: "As we walked across the moonlight gravel to the porch he disposed of the situation in a few brisk phrases" (p. 143). But Gatsby still dreams, stands in moonlight with his pink suit glowing against the dark shrubbery in the background. Whether or not any vestiges of sacrament cling to his vigil, he mans the watch. Moonlight for Gatsby still connotes romance, even intrigue, and Nick leaves him standing in the moonlight, "watching over nothing" (p. 146).

Although he is amazed at Gatsby's belief that he can recapture the moonlit nights with the Daisy of five years past, Nick, too, sets up a romantic image of the West, an image he would recapture. When he leaves the East, which has become an El Greco nightmare under a "lustreless moon," he
seeks his Christmas-vacation idealization of the West. He recalls a time when we pulled out into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and tinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild bract; came suddenly into the air.... That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the streetlamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. (p. 177)

Nick has learned much about human nature. Oddly, he does not know that this winter Arcady no longer exists for him. His chances of returning to it exactly equal the possibilities of Gatsby finding the pure white Daisy of Louisville. This was the Middle West of youth, not of a man five years too old to lie to himself. It exists momentarily for some people, never again for Nick.

Fitzgerald makes one final comment on what happened to Gatsby's dream. The last time Nick sees the "huge incoherent failure of a house," he finds glowing in the moonlight an obscene word scrawled on the steps with a piece of brick (p. 181). Romantic light on obscenity. With the strength and energy to become anything, Gatsby and America plagiarized an adolescent dream. Fascinating, awesome in execution, the product of that false dream remains forever an obscenity.

Nick would wipe away the obscenity, start over with a new dream. The same moon would shine, but the "inessential houses" would melt (p. 182). Knowing the dream impossible, Nick believes in it. With glowing terms of understanding, he describes Gatsby's belief in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther.... And one fine morning— (p. 182)

The punctuation, the dash comprehends the futility of Nick's hope, as well as the necessity of it. Fitzgerald cannot lie and say the dream might be realized; he dares not proclaim it impossible, and yet he ends the novel with a tone of heavy resignation: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (p. 182).

The image projected in moonlight, of course, resides in the head of the beholder. Thus moonlight is as man-made as any form of artificial light, and whoever separates the two—artificial light and moonlight—stands on shaky ground. But classifications are always arbitrary, and shaky ground can be profitable. In this case, I think it profitable to discuss artificial light as a separate category.

( ...)

If light-dark imagery in The Great Gatsby exposes the dream as the product of a third-rate imagination, a thing a bright teenager might create, the dirt-disease-decay imagery shows the dream as tarnished. Both image patterns examine the American dream, the dream that is the subject of The Great Gatsby, Tender is the Night, and The Last Tycoon. In one sense The Great Gatsby looks forward to The Last Tycoon; it is The Last Tycoon inverted. The Last Tycoon tells the story of the corruption of those who enter Hollywood. Hollywood functions as dream factory, Stahr as plant manager. He tells the writer, Boxley, "We have to take people's favorite; folklore and dress it up and give it back to them" (p. 105). Stahr decides what that folklore is, dictates what people dream. Despite Stahr's best efforts as artist, corruption riddles his factory of dreams. And Gatsby, the consumer, takes a dream such as Stahr might weave, thinks it his own. The very purity arising from Gatsby's devotion to the dream paradoxically leads to his own corruption. The Last Tycoon, then, deals with the corruption of those who manufacture dreams; The Great Gatsby explores the plight of the consumer, the man who buys pot metal, reveres it as gold.
References to decay of various sorts appear often enough in *The Great Gatsby* to form a major motif. Decay images fall under three main headings: the valley of ashes; the ravages of humanity against humanity; and moral rot. Each of these categories appears in Nick's famous line containing the essence of dirt-disease-decay imagery in the novel:

No, Gatsby turned out all right in 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 sorrows and shortwinded elations of men. (p. 2)

The "foul dust" symbolizes the valley of ashes, a vast dead valley that bursts geographical barriers to include both Eggs as well as New York and, by extension, the United States. The valley serves as one huge metaphor symbolic of a land that produces only dust and death. This waste land ranks in sterility with anything in the Eliot poem. While an apparent contrast exists between the waste land and either East or West Egg, the contrast is just that—apparent. On West Egg Gatsby produces a "vast meretricious beauty" that serves a purpose for a time, but his empire wilts under the gaze of Daisy. Because his dream was meaningless, hollow, it ends absolutely with Gatsby's death, lies as inert and dead as the valley of ashes. Gatsby leaves no legacy except the story Nick tells.

If the contrast between West Egg and the valley of ashes resembles that of the prairie vs. low, rolling foothills, the contrast between the valley and East Egg should approach that of flatland vs. mountain. Fitzgerald practically forces the comparison by juxtaposing the green light at the end of the first chapter with the waste land images that open chapter 2. Yet East Egg produces nothing that sets it above the dust and death of ashes. The dialogue of East Egg is more sophisticated, but no more original and certainly no nearer any standard of universal truth. Tom's string of polo ponies is of even less practical use than Wilson's aging car. The boredom spawned in each place seems equally intense. And the gray of the ash heaps approaches the dominant color of the Buchanan estate—white.

Foul dust floats from all three places. More clearly than Tom or Gatsby, of course, Wilson sinks into his environment: "A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity" (p. 26). While Wilson is a part of his environment, he only accepted it, did not create it. Tom and Gatsby are not as guiltless. While both took from others their respective utopian ideas, they at least had a choice over what to plagiarize. Only Wilson, born to exist in the valley of death, had no choice, made no attempt to control.

The waste land pervades both East and West Egg because travelers from either place must cross the valley of death. Nick and Gatsby observe foul dust as they drive into the city:

We passed Port Roosevelt, where there was a glimpse of red-belted ocean-going ships and sped along a cobbled slum lined with dark, undeserted saloons of the faded-gilt nineteen-hundreds. (p. 68)

Fitzgerald highlights this theme of corruption in two ways: first, Gatsby extricates himself from the clutches of a policeman by showing a Christmas card from the commissioner, thus indicating moral corruption from top to bottom, at least in the police department; second, having solved the problem with the law, Nick and Gatsby encounter a problem no one can handle—death. Crossing the Queensboro Bridge, they meet a corpse, the ultimate corruption. Later they meet Meyer Wolfsheim, corruption personified, and he continues the theme of death with his tale of the murder of Rosy Rosenthal.

Appropriately, Myrtle dies in the valley of ashes. Had she not lived in what becomes a major symbol of death and decay, Myrtle might not have sought outside stimuli. Still, the valley of ashes
does not kill her; she dies because she met that interloper into the valley of death, Tom Buchanan.
Wilson, a soldier in that great army of living dead, dies for the same reason.

The valley provides the setting for the first death, Gatsby's mansion for the next two. After Myrtle
dies, Nick and Gatsby spend the night together at what in tabloid parlance will become the death
house. Here they seal a friendship, begin to view one another as human beings. Yet the house
resembles a tomb: "There was an inexplicable amount of dust everywhere and the rooms were
musty...." (p. 147). Gatsby seems to have given up on his house. Already it resembles the valley
of ashes, the smoldering remains of dreams.

Leaving Gatsby, Nick boards the train for work. As he passes the valley of ashes, he crosses to the
other side of the car to avoid decay and death. He would spurn reminders of mortality. But no one
avoids the ash heap. In *The Great Gatsby*, the foul dust of the valley of ashes functions
symbolically as a ubiquitous *memento mori*, the symbolic contradiction of Gatsby's belief that a
man might wipe clean the corruption of the past and begin anew as innocent as a virgin child.

Juxtaposed with pervasive dirt and decay imagery are references to the ravages of man. Most
destructive of all is Tom, who hurts people, wrecks things. He causes pain, is too insensitive to
know he does it. The first proof of this is Daisy's bruised finger; Tom does not recall hurting it.
Daisy's injury results from one of many accidents, all of which could have been prevented. Tom
causes one of many automobile accidents, Daisy another, a more serious one. Carelessness is
universal in this novel, but Tom and Daisy, who care less than most people, cause their hog's
share of pain through a series of destructive accidents. Tom, who smashes Gatsby's dream as
deliberately as he smashes Myrtle Wilson's nose, sometimes is more calculatingly cruel than
careless.

Obviously, others besides the Buchanans dispense destruction and decay. Violence lurks forever
just below the surface, remains a constant possibility. Tom, booted athlete whole powerful body
strains against his riding clothes, finally threatens no more than Gatsby. Because of the amount of
energy—and waste—expended to create these parties, a Gatsby festival always presents the
danger of unchanneled force: "Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a
fruiterer in New York—every Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a
pyramid of pulpless halves" (p. 39). Gatsby's parties, and by extension, his way of life, cause
death, burn things up. Efficiency experts would be appalled at the meagerness of the product
compared with the energy expended. And damage must be repaired. When a girl rips her gown,
Gatsby, to stave off chaos, replaces it with a more expensive one. As Nick observes, after each
party someone must repair the "ravages of the night before" (p. 39). Thus Gatsby establishes a
cycle: through the week he creates a haven of perfect order only to loose forces of destructive
chaos on Saturday night.

The parties end when Gatsby notes Daisy's distaste for his extravagance. He sees the parties
through Daisy's eyes. Disconsolate, he walks with Nick: "He broke off and began to walk up and
down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers" (p. 111). Here he
makes the claim that he can repeat the past. He walks in ruins, the ravages of his party, even as
he assures Nick that he *can* repeat the past. As Gatsby states his dream, Fitzgerald repeats once
more the familiar motif that just below the surface glitter lies ruin. With remarkable economy,
Fitzgerald makes clear the dream and makes a symbolic comment on it.

Daisy and Jordan, too, are entangled in corruption imagery. On the Buchanans' wedding day, for
example, the heat matches that of the sweltering day in New York when Daisy again renounces
Gatsby and reaffirms Tom. At the wedding a man named Biloxi faints, becomes, like Klipspringer, a
freeloading boarder. He sponges for three weeks at the Baker house before Jordan's father kicks
him out. Baker dies the next day, but Jordan assures Nick that the eviction and death were not
connected. Jordan is correct, but the parallel between Daisy's first rejection of Gatsby and
affirmation of Tom and that New York scene is deliberate. The common ingredients are intense heat, rejection of Gatsby, and affirmation of Tom followed by death. True to his common practice in *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald tells the same story twice—one humorously, once tragically.

Corruption surrounds Daisy even before the wedding. After Gatsby leaves for war, Daisy leads a seemingly carefree, innocent life. Yet hints of dirt and decay add ominous hues to the sparkling colors of her social life. At parties feet shuffle the "shining dust" on the dance floor (as Myrtle's feet shuffle "foul dust" of the valley of ashes), and when she falls asleep at dawn, she leaves "the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed" (p. 151). Decay images and images of carelessness converge here to indicate that Gatsby's dream is futile from the start. Corruption in Daisy's world is subtle, but definitely present; in Gatsby's world corruption is obvious, but unimportant. Conversely, Daisy's elegance and taste are apparent, but not important; one must search, as Nick does, to ferret out the fine qualities of Gatsby.\(^\text{30}\)

**Notes**


9. Howard S. Babb, "*the Great Gatsby* and the Grotesque," *Criticism*, 5 (Fall 1963), 339. Babb points out as examples of the grotesque the description of McKee's picture and the "gossip columns which lie side by side with a book concerning religion—all of these contrasts hooting at the vulgarity of Mrs. Wilson."

10. Mathew J. Bruccoli, "A Note on Jordan Baker," *Fitzgerald/Hemingway Annual* (1970), 232–33. "The name Jordan Baker is contradictory. The Jordan was a sporty car with a romantic image.... The Baker was an electric car, a lady's car—in fact an old lady's car.... This contradiction is appropriate to her character: although she initially seems to share Nick's conservative standards, he is compelled to reject her because of her carelessness." See also Laurence E. MacPhee, *"The Great Gatsby"'s 'Romance of Motoring': Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker," *Modern fiction studies*, 18 (Summer 1972), 208. MacPhee suggests that Fitzgerald derived Jordan Baker's name "from two of the best-known trade names in motoring, the Jordan "Playboy" and Baker "Fastex" velvet, a luxury upholstery fabric for automobiles." See also Roderick S. Speer, *"The Great Gatsby"'s 'Romance of Motoring' and 'The Cruise of the Rolling Junk,'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 20 (Winter 1974–75), 540–43. Agreeing with MacPhee's thesis that Fitzgerald was both aware of and influenced by romantic automobile advertising when he wrote *The Great Gatsby*, Speer points out that Fitzgerald contributed a serialized article called "The Cruise of the Rolling Junk" to *Motor Magazine*. This article, according to Speer, evinces Fitzgerald's "constant sense of the disappointment always lurking at the fringes of idealism and enthusiasm." This theme "bears directly on that endangered romanticism ... which lies at the heart of *Gatsby*...." (pp. 540–41). Indeed, much of the point of the automobile imagery is that the car, envisioned by the characters as a romantic means of escape, leads in reality down a one-way road toward death.

11. Henry Dan Piper, "The Untrimmed Christmas Tree" in *Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby,"* ed. Henry Dan Piper (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 98. In an earlier version, Gatsby's car was an even more blatant symbol of death than it is here: "In one draft, when Gatsby proudly
shows Nick his oversized yellow sports car ('the death car,' as the New York newspapers will later call it after Myrtle's death), Nick is automatically reminded of a hearse."


17. Lehan, F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Craft of fiction, p. 120.

18. Dale B.J. Randall, "The 'Seer' and 'Seen' Theme in Gatsby and Some of Their Parallels in Eliot and Wright," Twentieth Century Literature, 10 (July 1964), 52.


20. Schneider, "Color Symbolism in The Great Gatsby," 14. Silver symbolizes "both the dream and the reality, since as the color of the romantic stars and moon ... it is clearly associated with the romantic hope and promise that govern Gatsby's life, and as the color of money it is obviously a symbol of corrupt idealism."


27. Daniel J. Schneider, "Color Symbolism in The Great Gatsby," 14. White, the traditional color of purity, is used ironically in the cases of Daisy and Jordan. "Daisy is the white flower—with the golden center," and brass buttons both grace and tarnish her dress. Off-whites, brass and variants of yellow, symbolize money, greed, corruption.


The most eloquent irony of the novel is generated by the subtle interplay between, on the one hand, the elegance and charm of Daisy's world as opposed to the cunningness of its inner corruption and, on the other hand, the gaudy elaborateness of Gatsby's efforts to emulate its surface as contrasted with the uncontaminated fineness of his heart.

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