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GREEN LIGHT OR SQUARE OF LIGHT IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

. . . he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps. . . . His life had been confused and disordered. . . , but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was.¹

In launching upon the unknown, European explorers of North America committed themselves as much to an encounter with space, time, and being as with territory. That the commitment was largely unwitting probably increased rather than lessened the energy of the encounter, along with its inherent tensions. The idea of unfilled space offered despair as well as hope, alienation as well as engagement; the idea of a time just beginning, disorientation as well as renewal of the hope that man would be restored to a new Eden. Men must have found it difficult to distinguish vision from a horror of the vacuum or the void. For later European settlers and their descendants, the baffling encounter apparently has not ceased. It figures in almost all North American fiction, and all but dominates *The Great Gatsby*.

Although Fitzgerald was not much given to philosophic speculation as such, and despite his feeling that the book was "dramatic", with *Gatsby* he came very close to writing either a philosophical novel about American history or an historical work upon the springs of North American psychology and philosophy. Fortunately for literature, he instead wrote a novel of lyrical discovery, conveyed for the most part in affective images. Two of those images, which in their way comment profoundly upon the North American encounter with space, time, and being, are those of a line leading to a green light, and a flat white light fixed and bounded in a square.²

Classroom pronouncements that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points (or, better, an infinite number of points extending in two directions) and that two right triangles may compose a square are no doubt sufficiently tiresome. Applied to human aspirations, however, they may become meaningful and moving. The line leading from Jay Gatsby to both the past and the future moves freely and yearningly across space and time. It is seen most powerfully in his gesture toward a green light across the water. The square sought out or inhabited by the Buchanans, on the other hand, attempts to freeze, flatten, or contain space and time. It is suggested in their being framed several times in doorways and windows,³ as if in underdeveloped, but space-limiting and time-arresting, still photographs.

Within the context of those images, the principal characters of *Gatsby* are important not so much in themselves as in their beliefs. The line and the square serve to distinguish Gatsby's committed hopefulness from the Buchanans' encapsulating carelessness. His line to the green light leads back (and thus forward) to the incorruptible New World dream. Their rectangle, with its safely doubled, limiting parallel lines, fashions a closed, complicitous parody of that dream. The line is "commensurate to [man's] capacity for wonder", whereas men within the square will be "careless. . . [smashing] up things and creatures and then [retreating] back into their money or their vast carelessness" (pp. 182, 180). The line signifies "romantic readiness" (p. 2); the square, a foul dust which forms in its wake. And the line seems living, the square, dead.

Different though the line and the square appear to be, they are constitutionally related. In keeping with the unknown character of the New World and its new men, both involve visions or dreams — which may, of course, prove to be nightmares. Jay Gatsby is not alone in trying to embody a Platonic conception of himself and his world. Fitzgerald perceives with pity that in the birth of the twentieth-century American from his self-conceiving, even the best will be trailed by clouds that are foul, inglorious. Like the Buchanans, the North American must now inhabit an urban corruption of the New World that once dazzled the eyes of Dutch sailors. His defiled, lowercase new world has been reduced to being "material without being real" (p. 162). New York City is mainly illusion, having been built "with a wish out of

. . . money" (p. 69). All of the characters, fair and foul alike, are met in Willy Loman country, and the dream still comes with the territory. In Manhattan especially, each man must repeat something of the Dutch sailors' encounter, largely because it was ultimate and imperative, the "last time in history" (p. 182) when a majestic natural object would match or lead man's capacity for wonder. Despite their supposed love for the future, all North Americans are thus seen by Fitzgerald to be borne back by inexorable currents to that definitive newness,⁴ which continues to be newer than the most recent machine or popular song.

Offered intimations of those currents and that goal, the Buchanans exploit the New World's materiality, Jay Gatsby seeks its "reality", and Nick Carraway hesitates at the crossroads, a Brooks Brother Hercules. Originally drawn to the Buchanans, he eventually chooses with Gatsby. And like Gatsby, the "man who gives his name to [the] book", and Nick, the modern Horatio who tells his story, the novel itself pursues the immaterial green light. Gradually, it moves back from Nick, Jay, and the corrupt present, seeking the past dream. Conceivably, the entire New World might find restoration in the green light if, like Gatsby, it truly wished "to recover something [and] could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly" (pp. 111-112). The only apparent alternative to such a quest is the parodic "short-cut from nothing to nothing" (p. 108) taken by Gatsby's partygoers. It is marked also by the car wrecks which constitute a wrenching Chorus for the novel.⁵

In close correspondence with the two geometric forms and their significance, the novel is shaped into roughly equal halves.⁶ Largely because the work itself is a graph of Nick Carraway's progress,⁷ the first half of the work emphasizes the square; the second, the line. Each half also stresses two internal narratives. In delving Gatsby and the New World to the root, they also help to discover Nick to himself.⁸ Those of the first half serve mainly to explain the present Jay and Daisy, and are "set" mostly in the present. Those of the second (one of which is supplied by Nick himself) seek meaning and justice in the past. The first half also sees Nick scout several personal squares in the process of scouting their geographical equivalent — East Egg, the valley of ashes, West Egg, New York. In the second half, that movement is almost exactly reversed, as Nick cuts himself off from one after another of the personal and geographical sides of the square. He also cuts the

associated web of telephone connections. The reverse movement is confirmed when Nick at last abandons a debased, Karamazovian East in which "anything can happen" for his original midwest. He thus enacts his mature insistence that human conduct be founded on something other than "money or . . . vast carelessness" (p. 180). He also seeks a place where men might still find "identity with this country" (p. 177).

Despite the error both Jay and Nick have made by mistaking a modern "vast, vulgar, and meretricious" imitation (p. 99) for a truly Platonic love and being, at the end of the work Nick is able to pronounce "lastly" upon the blank white square and the living green line. Like Gatsby, he and the novel celebrate the New World's essentially "incorruptible dream" — even though conceding that, up to a point, the object of the dream is likely to be discoverable only in the largely uncorrupted dreamer.⁹

I

"I can't help what's past", cries Daisy. "Of course you can [repeat the past] ", Jay insists. "I wouldn't ask too much of her. . . you can't repeat the past", cautions Nick Carraway, the narrator-hero (pp. 133, III). Nick notwithstanding, the novel itself "of course" repeats the past. Almost as soon as it is begun, it moves to the experienced New York past of Nick Carraway. It proceeds then to the more distant past represented in four internal narratives — a past which Nick progressively shares and interprets. Although Nick's final awareness is framed in the narrative present, it has to do with a still more remote, originating past which is therefore the American future — that of the exploration and definition of the New World. Although the essential reality that has reappeared is unknown to most of the characters during the rushing past (which seems to them so hermetically present), it is intimated in the "elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words" (p. 112) that Nick has sensed and tried to "repeat" after hearing part of Gatsby's story. The words probably would have whispered something like "Redeem the time"; and the rhythm might have traced for an unfallen East a green thought in a green shade.

During much of the first half of *The Great Gatsby*, however, Nick too seeks only the daylight or the klieg-lit square. His drive is seen as typical. Almost all of the characters at first stretch lame hands toward a

frenetic present and receding future, believing that they have thus turned their backs on the past. For them, Manhattan will never be the magnificent green breast of a New World. Even at best, it is only a rectangular city "rising up. . . in white heaps and sugar lumps", in which "anything can happen" (p. 69). At worst, it resembles the related "small block of yellow brick" near the valley of ashes, which is itself "contiguous to absolutely nothing" (p. 24). It takes a while for Nick to recognize that the square formed by East Egg, the valley of ashes, New York, and West Egg is a single debased setting and that its excitement conceals indifference and the levelling of all values. It honors only fashion and more or less inconspicuous consumption. Nevertheless, to most of its adherents it seems to offer both a goal and a sanctuary. It even promises them its own version of "all the mystery and. . . beauty in the world" (p. 69). What its parody actually yields is only a universal toleration combined with universal, undemanding scepticism. Such tolerance appears, however, to reflect "infinite hope" (p. 1) in the flickering urban creature. Thus the square, unlike the green light with its solitary intensity, seems to offer an amoral, multifarious, diffuse, and anonymous generality. Each adherent's carefully truncated individual "line" soon makes parallel discovery or disclosure of other brief lines. Despite the original promise of freedom and toleration, conspiracy or complicitousness are either sought out or thrust upon such people. The similar lines are thus bent or complicated until they fashion an enclosing square. No longer simple or free, the doubled parallels restrict even as they reflect one another. Frequently, the personal "square" is initiated when the three members of a right triangle seductively command a fourth to join them. In East Egg, the triangle Tom/Daisy/Jordan solicits Nick as a fourth; in New York, he is sought by the triangle Tom/Myrtle/Catherine. Near the centre of the novel, in what is more a threat than a promise, Nick is almost brought into a new rectangle with Jay/Daisy/Jordan. However, one aim of such parallelograms is the exclusion of moral threats and social misfits. Gatsby therefore is never included. Even at his own party, "no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link." At almost the same time, Nick chooses to exclude himself, refusing to make a fourth when an undergraduate and two chorus girls engage in "an obstetrical conversation" (pp. 50, 51).

Partly because Nick has deliberately left his own "Old World" in the midwest to seek this version of the East, believing that here "life was beginning over again" (p. 4), choice of the square or line remains before him, emblematically, throughout the novel. It appears most graphically when he and Jordan are riding in Central Park. Having passed a nocturnal, Gatsbyesque "barrier of dark trees", they come to a "block of delicate pale light". The girl beside Nick is a "clean, hard, limited person, who [deals] in universal scepticism." She will never be the Platonic idea of beauty, "whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs" (p. 81). If she is not exactly a mote of foul dust, she certainly is no green light. It is within a frame of white light that the early Nick had bent to kiss her. Metaphorically, it is also within a context of white light, framing the conspiratorial Buchanans of the close, that he eventually rejects her.

In the course of Nick's neo-Cooperian scouting of East Egg, West Egg, New York, and the valley of ashes — for among other things, he is "a guide, a pathfinder" (p. 4) — he at first elects East Egg. It seems to him all that he has come East to seek. However, the unperceived parallels that eventually form a closed, unitary square commence at once. As is stressed at the end of the novel, when Nick, like the first European explorers, must ride westward if he is to explore the true East, factual geography has little to do with social or philosophical geometry. Partly for that reason, the Nick who seeks out East Egg has not yet left home. Although the midwestern Carraways have present social standing, they were once civil war merchants, the opportunistic Gatsbys of their day; furthermore, they have encouraged him to go East and enter the "bond business". Although the relative stability of his family inclines Nick away from Gatsby's raw pseudo-Norman castle to the "white palaces of . . . East Egg" (p. 5), he is not yet aware that Jay, too, had sought a golden princess in a white palace, and that New York's white rectangles have long since replaced the physical green breast of the New World. Although he may have recalled the original East and his present physical midwest in taking a home with "wide lawns and friendly trees", his will is set wholly upon the sophisticated promise of East Egg.

Although the setting has seemed to alter when Nick arrives at the East Egg side of the square, the American dream has not. The Buchanans' Georgian mansion may not be quite so out of place in

America as a fake castle, and their social background seems less gaudy than Jay's new money and show-business associates. However, Tom's wish for an irrecoverable football game is not appreciably different from the young Gatsby's dream "universe of ineffable gaudiness" (p. 99). Similarly, the restlessness of the Buchanan set is not essentially different from the transcendence and anonymity of the Gatsby parties, nor Jordan Baker's cheating at golf from Wolfsheim's fixing the World Series, nor Tom's physical cruelty from the guns used for Gatsby by Wolfsheim's people. And the characteristic wasteland restlessness is as marked in the flashing eyes of Tom and Daisy as in Gatsby's extravagant parties.

This is not to say that East Egg and its square of light cannot seem romantic. Daisy and Jordan, two of the intersecting points, are first seen within the "bright rosy-colored space" formed by French windows (p. 8). Dressed in white, the cool and effortless women seem to levitate on the undemanding air. Unlike Jay, who listens to others, Daisy's voice demands that men listen to its whispered promise (p. 9) — which turns out to be money. Both women have a sad or wan brightness in harmony with fashionable coolness, scepticism, "absence of all desire" (p. 12), and "practicality". The scene is not only reassuring but transferable; when the Buchanans dine, they move to a "rosy-colored porch, open toward the sunset" (p. 12). Although Daisy makes small talk about the future, she sips time without effort, almost indifferently.

At last, a jarring phone call from New York shivers the seemingly protected evening. But in any case, the women's cool whiteness, framed within rose-colored squares of light, had always been too white: too like the newspaper pictures of Jordan (pp. 9, 19); too like the "white ashen dust" (p. 26) that sifts over Wilson in the valley of ashes; too prophetic of the woman in a white evening gown in Nick's later El Greco nightmare, who also was etherized upon indifference. For some of these reasons, Nick at once moves to a judgment against the East as well as its immediate representation, East Egg. Whereas Jordan treats the New York call with "hardy scepticism" (p. 16), Nick wants to call the police. He also reacts sharply when Daisy enacts pain but converts it into a spuriously thrilling display of sophistication. In contrast to his later reluctant belief in Gatsby, he refuses the "contributory" suspension of honesty asked by Daisy (p. 18). Despite her opening up to

him, as she had once opened up for Gatsby, in a "flower-like way" (p. 20), Nick stubbornly recalls Jordan Baker's related dishonesty in sports. All but commanded to join this East Egg triangle, taking his place in the "cheerful square of light" in which the Buchanans are framed (p. 20), he leaves. Almost at once he comes upon Gatsby alone in darkness, stretching his arms toward the green light. Nick, too, had just been responding to the original New World's "loud, bright night, with wings beating in the trees and a persistent organ sound as the full bellows of the earth blew the frogs full of life" (p. 21). His faint judgment against the East is thus paired with a possible sentiment for night, a green light, and Gatsby.

Nevertheless, by daylight he continues among the "roadhouse roofs and . . . wayside garages" (p. 21) of the geographic rectangle. He finds in the valley of ashes not only an ultimate reduction of the green breast of the New World, along with the reduction of Jay's Platonic vision to the blank commercial stare of Dr. Eckleburg, but also the "impossible" triangle Tom/Myrtle/George. Like all the other characters, Nick hurries to escape from the valley. He therefore offers little resistance when Tom all but commands him to join the New York triangle Tom/Myrtle/Catherine. However, this second side of the geographic square is the most instructive of the lot. It suggests the destiny, and perhaps the essence, of the other sides, no matter how glamorously they may be studded with white cities, white palaces, or movie-star white light.

When he encounters the third side, New York City, Nick can still sense something of the original dream. Fifth Avenue is so idyllic that he "wouldn't have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep turn the corner" (p. 28). Nevertheless, his allegiance still inclines to the modern East. Its homogeneous nature is stressed again by the insistent rising of unperceived parallels between East Egg and New York. If the valley's Myrtle Wilson is all "smouldering" vitality (p. 25) in contrast to Daisy's white coolness, a metaphorical bond is supplied by her ghostly husband, covered in "white ashen dust". If Myrtle's living room in New York is overcrowded (somewhat like Gatsby's house, later), it is only that she is new at being a golden girl involved in fashionable consumption. So is her sister Catherine, the proxy Jordan for Nick in this second Buchanan rectangle. Catherine is a trifle too open in staring "possessively at the furniture" (p. 30).

When Tom's New York party disintegrates into acrid smoke and violence, it asserts the city's kinship with East Egg and the valley of ashes. Nick moves toward a similar judgment upon it. Increasingly, he sees himself as spectator and judge almost as much as participant and agent in the action.¹⁰ He is thus aware that a watcher in the anonymous street below might find the square of light from Myrtle's wretched party as fascinating as he himself had once found the East. By appraising the rectangle from the outside, he tends to reserve his stand outside it.

When Nick scouts the last major side of the quadrilateral — West Egg —, his capacity for such detachment and judgment goes with him. At first, it seems that the foul current side of paradise should here reach its dubious perfection. Not only is Nick, the character common to all four settings, solicited to join the flickering, amoral crowd, but also Gatsby's house seems to unite in one setting East Egg's rich restlessness, New York's mechanical excitement, and the valley's raw decay. Here, in a permanent "short-cut from nothing to nothing", Friday night's citrus becomes Monday's garbage. Groups form and dissolve in much the same way that men seem to crumble in the valley. And modern Europeans explore Gatsby's parties seeking only money, not the other New World. If the partygoers can find anything to wonder at, it is only the mystery of Gatsby (whom Nick alone finds to be truly incomprehensible). All the others melt easily into the rectangles possible in a large, anonymous party which is, as Jordan notes, "so intimate". Her *mot* agrees with Nick's earlier sense that in New York one might carelessly enter any other lives, for "no one would ever know or disapprove" (pp. 50, 57).

Like telephone calls, automobiles serve to join the four settings that Nick has now explored. They also reflect the central carelessness of the East. Although Nick reports the wreck that concludes the West Egg evening comically, he later describes the wreck in his El Greco dream with surrealistic horror. His stand against such smashups, metaphorical as well as real, opposes him to a general indifference to such wrecks. It is the hope of Jordan Baker, for example, that Nick will prove to be a "careful" driver. She actually means that he be totally indifferent, willing to see or cause wrecks while remaining unmoved; to be other than permissive would be to act the "bad driver" (pp. 59, 179).

Nick's decisive turn from the square to the line occurs in the West

Egg setting, in which it might have been least expected. It begins as the original American dream insistently penetrates the foul modern confetti of Gatsby's party. Once again, the moon seems to "float in the Sound" in a "triangle of silver scales". The somewhat tipsy Nick finds the scene to be "significant, elemental, and profound" at almost exactly the instant that he encounters Gatsby's momentary smile of "eternal reassurance" (pp. 47, 48). In the evening's host, Nick unexpectedly rediscovers hope that each man really is the better self he sometimes wishes to be. Like the first Dutch sailors, Gatsby seems to register disinterested wonder in a direct line — the human being at one point, and his joy in the essence of material objects at the other. For an instant, man becomes as he "hath been of yore".

Prophetically, both Gatsby and Nick reject the cacophonous party, even as they are rejected by it. Upon taking his solitary departure, Nick turns to see Gatsby standing alone beneath a "wafer of a moon" (p. 56). In another indication that the first half of the novel is reaching its close, Nick's own narration, which had developed the geographic and personal rectangles, surrenders to the more "objective" narrations of Jay and Jordan. These accounts not only help Nick to comprehend himself as well as Gatsby but also to judge the two narrators. That judgment is itself a mark of Nick's progress. In hearing the seemingly fantastic yarn told him by Jay, Nick's first impulse was to hoot, somewhat aristocratically, at dime-novel hokum. His discovery of factual truth, to say nothing of romantic "reality", within Jay's story comes as a revelation. After wavering between "believing everything and nothing about him", Nick accepts a form of belief (p. 102). On the other hand, Jordan's account of Daisy, Jay, and Tom in Louisville creates only disillusionment. Far from discovering truth within hokum, it shows Nick only the hard rock of reality. Like Jordan in the present, Daisy then had chosen hard power, wealth, and practicality; she had, indeed, " 'change' her mine' " from Gatsby and romance (p. 77). Therefore, neither woman can at first associate Gatsby with the vanished "officer in [Daisy's] white car" (p. 79). As Gatsby's princess in a white palace, Daisy had been more than actual; as her lover in a white car, Gatsby might as well have perished. Whether or not the past can be repeated thus depends in large part upon romantic readiness, some of which appears in concentrated awareness of another person. As

Nick has noticed, such attention is characteristic of Gatsby. It separates people from the anonymous square, making each one, at least for an instant, a green light.

In Jordan's narrative, love had dwindled down to Tom's involvement in a car wreck with a mistress and Daisy's having put money into her voice. Fading into unromantic desire, love thus led to Jordan's universal scepticism, not Gatsby's eternal reassurance. Instinctively, the auditorial Nick elects Gatsby's starlight over Jordan's "casual moths" and a popular song's bathetic "shiek of Araby" (p. 80). By means of the two narratives, he has been brought close, "objectively", to the Platonic creation of Gatsby. Therefore, it is not Gatsby alone who has come alive, "delivered. . . from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (p. 79).

The meaning of the square and the line, and of Nick's progress from the one to the other, is confirmed in action as the first half closes. By opening his own house for the central union of Jay with Daisy, Nick offers a choice between the two forms. At first amused by Jay's awkward romanticism, thus recapitulating his first impression of Jay's story, Nick soon finds that his committed heart is beating as quickly as Jay's. He not only comprehends Jay's aspiration but is in "ecstatic cahoots" with it (p. 154). However, the meeting is clouded from the start. Not only may it produce only another square, with Jay displacing Tom, but also it may present merely one more instance of Daisy's cool Louisville insularity. Such a fear is hinted in Gatsby's having dressed in a silver shirt and golden tie to meet the golden girl from a white palace. Although he is born again within the dream, "literally" glowing with a "new well-being" as if he might be a true "patron of recurrent light" (p. 90), and although the "prehistoric marshes" in Nick's lawn (p. 89) might have served as the green breast of a New World, the object of the dream fails the dreamer. Gatsby's dream-house therefore no longer seems "real" to Gatsby.

If Nick assigns some blame to Jay for investing his Galatea with more promise and meaning that she could embody, he charges Daisy with the major failure. The internal narratives all agreed that she had once "blossomed like a flower". If Jay had feared that in love his mind would no longer be free to "romp. . . like the mind of God" (p. 112), having surrendered a Keatsian Cynthia for one mortal creature, he was wrong. Daisy as "fay" could have been to herself as well as him all that

the Dutch sailors had once found the flowering New World to be. The day's-eye would then have been both a good naturalist and a good Platonist. It need not have turned plutocrat or mere levitating *objet d'art*.

Because Daisy's life and meaning are bounded by the square, it is fitting that the first part of the novel should close upon framing windows — windows that close in, rather than open out upon, human vision, as in Nick's early "single window" (p. 4). For Jay, who looks from a window with Daisy, there is only mist, not a green light. For Daisy, rose-colored clouds serve as mist. And for Nick, there is a warning sight of "lights. . . going on in West Egg" windows and in the trains "plunging home from New York" (p. 96). As the Teiresias of this violet hour, Nick casts one glance back upon the "intense" life of the lovers, which has so denominalized the world that neither "knows" the departing friend (p. 97).¹¹ If the intensity has been rendered suspect by the several flats of white light, Nick's judgment has not. Gatsby's "count of enchanted objects" may have been "diminished by one" (p. 94), but Nick's just reckoning has endorsed the enchantment itself.

2

To discover a future worth seeking, the second half of *The Great Gatsby* insistently looks through present waste and tragedy to the pasts of both Gatsby and North America. Nick, an explorer become a guide, serves as interpretative historian in that quest long before enacting it personally by returning to his own "starting place". By means of his thought and action, the present Eastern square is penetrated like a white plastic card by a laser beam. It is a triumph of truth and meaning in the midst of an apparent defeat by careless power and practicality.

Recapitulating the beginning of the novel and at the same time adding "objectivity" to Nick's voice within it, Fitzgerald opens upon a tyro newsman on the prowl for a lead story. Like Nick and the reader at the beginning of the novel, he has no idea who or what Gatsby is. When he demands a statement, Jay is polite but puzzled, and Nick characteristically amused. However, Nick then unexpectedly assumes the reporter's role himself. Proposing to clear away the "first wild rumors about [Gatsby's] antecedents" (p. 102),¹² Nick not only serves as historian both within and after Gatsby's life but also manages to

identify Gatsby's true Platonic Father. In seeming to surrender his function as omniscient and subjective narrator, Nick actually becomes at once a reporter, a chronicler, and a tragic messenger. He serves to bring immediate "historic" truth as well as its full philosophic implications *to the reader*. Although Fitzgerald's odd momentary divestiture of Nick is less confident in practice than it may appear in description, the device itself allows Nick an objective voice within his own participative narration.¹³ With it, he himself offers the first of this section's two internal narratives.

As the reportorial Nick unfolds the "history" of Gatsby, Jay is more than ever identified as the true North American dreamer. He is the Platonic conception of himself; a God's-boy; almost, a Jay Christ — or as Tom would have it, a "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (p. 130). In the long run, it makes little difference that the materials for his conception were "vast, vulgar, and meretricious" (p. 99). This is not to say that the tragic Gatsby does not pay the high cost of such matter. By being not only a Platonic conception but also the peculiarly American manifestation of that idea, the "self-made man",¹⁴ he necessarily traces more from Horatio Alger than from God, and more from the nineteenth-century, Codyesque hero than from Alger; it is that progenitor who has imported to the present East all the "savagely violence of the frontier brothel and saloon" (p. 101) and who certifies that the American East is to be no Byzantium. Cody's yacht had represented "all the beauty and glamour in the world" to the boy Jay (pp. 100-101). It is no accident that New York similarly promised Nick "all the mystery and . . . beauty in the world" (p. 69). Yet, beneath it all, the possible wonder of the original New World dream was maintained in Gatsby. It permits him to believe he can repeat the past, for within it love and beauty are not time's fools. Although Gatsby cannot repeat the past or rewrite history, he can continue the ingrained North American vision. Had he not once seen ordinary sidewalks rise, and become new heavenly ladders? And had he not touched the New World's green breast and drunk from "the pap of life"? In spite of the flawed materials of his dream, Gatsby has been a Kubla Khan.¹⁵ Following him, Nick, too, has found his way into the charmed circle. Significantly, both men leave behind them square family portraits that would have defined Nick in the lineage of his "hard-boiled great-uncle", and Gatsby in the "hard, empty face" of Dan Cody. (pp. 3, 101).

Nick actually hears all this from Gatsby "very much later" (p. 102), but in any case has already doubly reversed time in acting the reporter. When he picks up the direct narrative again, he must detail the doubled rejection of Jay by the Buchanans. In the first, a triangle composed of Tom, Mr. Sloane, and an anonymous woman invade Jay's house but leave him alone, once more, at his own steps. The raw nominalist rock of the world is already beginning to break the fairy wing (p. 100). In the second, Daisy too rejects the West Egg universe which Jay has formed in order to meet her presumed purchase price. Although she is entranced by the silvery parody of Jay's starlight in the movie frame of a film star and her director, she otherwise fears the direct desperation and sweaty eagerness of Jay's partygoers. And Nick, seeing the gathering partly through her eyes but even more fully within his own, finds that Eastern glamour has turned tawdry. The "many-colored, many-keyed commotion" now is opposed not only by his increasing maturity but also by a new, "pervading harshness" (p. 105). It is associated largely with Daisy's condemnatory view and Tom's violent dislike for Jay. When the Buchanans leave, they are prophetically framed by "ten square feet of light volleying out into the soft black morning" (pp. 108-109). If Daisy regrets leaving "romantic possibilities", she nevertheless goes with Tom (p. 110).

Remaining behind with Jay, Nick now hears the final internal narrative of the work. It comes from a Gatsby who knows he has been rejected. Although his feet move over the fruit rinds and "crushed flowers" of present actuality (p. 111), Gatsby's mind moves in the past, when love had created a New World. Returned to that "starting place" (p. 112) and remembering its true moonlight, the wondering Gatsby acknowledges that he had then seemed to surrender Platonic word or idea in favor of human act and flesh. He instead found that his green shade had not vanished. It had instead gained a body, as when Milton's Adam awoke to find his dream was real. Daisy had "blossomed for him like a flower", incarnate (p. 112). Reversing Donne's formula, Gatsby had found that physical love might expand the ideal, not part from it.

Only at the catastrophe does Gatsby dwell upon the past. In that ashen moment he recalls that his wartime affair with Daisy had unexpectedly become the "following of a grail", not the quick, careless affair he had planned. Daisy, on the other hand, remained essentially untouched. Even then, she faded away from him into "her rich house,

into her rich, full life, leaving [him] nothing" (p. 149). In a world moved only by "love,. . . money,. . . unquestionable practicality" (p. 151), it is small wonder that later she hardly remembered Jay. To Gatsby, however, even her subsequent sexual bond to Tom would have been unimportant. It would have been "just personal" (p. 152), having little to do with the selfless, extra-historical love he himself manifests. Together with its sad last footnote, Gatsby's internal narrative has shown Nick and Jay always perceived Daisy with "some intensity. . . that couldn't be measured" (p. 152). It is partly for that reason that Nick later calls out to Jay, "They're a rotten crowd . . . You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (p. 154).

Much of the second half of *The Great Gatsby* is thus borne back to starting-points, seeking or following the green light. The rest sees the corrupt East of the white square crush that past like a party flower. Gatsby's trysts with Daisy have to be protected by Wolfsheim's gangsters. Summer returns. If the past cannot be repeated, it can nevertheless reveal parallels. Dreams aside, the novel begins to hurtle into a rushing rehearsal of the first part. In East Egg, to which Gatsby comes with Nick, the two women drift once again in white dresses. When Daisy and Jay look toward his house and no green light is to be seen, she cries, "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon. . . and the day after that, and the next thirty years?" (p. 118). Far from redeeming the time, they recapitulate Tom's trip with Myrtle to New York. But if Tom now seems to be an outsider because Daisy drives with Jay, nothing really has changed. Daisy's heart and voice are filled with money and the tinkling "cymbals' song of it" (p. 120), the way to the city still crosses the valley of ashes, and the Wilsons again present unacknowledged but insistent parallels. In a threatening recetangle of vision, Nick sees that Dr. Eckleburg's eyes are fixed on the ash-heaps; Myrtle Wilson's are upon her husband and the two cars; and her husband supplies a fourth set of eyes, later, when he looks out from a window into the blank eyes of Dr. Eckleburg. Because these sets of eyes make one in sight, a series of deaths begins to loom ahead.

By this season, New York, no green breast, has become "overripe" (p. 125). In a crowded hotel suite, the playing of a wedding march in a lower room forces their attention upon Daisy's marriage to Tom. Although it is now Tom, not Jay, who arouses Nick's laughter, it is Tom who carries the day — once more. While Jordan once again

balances a world of values on her indifferent chin, Daisy almost visibly retires into her protective Buchanan triangle. Even her "thrilling scorn" for Tom suggest her spurious scorn at the beginning of the novel (pp. 18, 132). She seeks out blankness, fastening herself permanently to Tom and his limitations. Only her voice reminds Nick and Jay of what she had once seemed to be:

only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, [with Gatsby] trying to touch what was *no longer* tangible, struggling unhappily, *undesperingly*, toward that lost voice across the room. (p. 135, italics added)

Although Daisy leaves New York with Jay, Tom's control over her is such that the lovers have now been "snapped out, made accidental, isolated, like ghosts" (p. 136). Except for Nick, Jay's immediate world has shrunk to ghosts and wraiths, on the one hand, and raw, volcanic reality on the other.

For Nick, the afternoon is decisive, ultimate. Although he makes one last attempt to seize the day with Jordan Baker, hoping that they will be "too wise ever to carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age" (p. 136), the careless square will not permit it. In swift rectangulation of East Egg, West Egg, and New York with the valley of ashes, Myrtle Wilson is murdered. When Nick learns that the Buchanans are allowing Jay to take the blame for Daisy, he refuses to enter their house with Jordan. Repeating (and confirming) an earlier scene, he sees Tom and Daisy sitting together conspiratorially in their "small rectangle of light" while Jay, below in the empty moonlight, mounts watch "over nothing" (p. 146). While the half-sick Carraway watches in spirit with Gatsby, who is now beset by both "grotesque reality and savage, frightening dreams" (p. 147), Daisy vanishes into her rich house, hoping that its white shell will both imprison and preserve youth and mystery (p. 150). Her wish for power, "security" (p. 149), and wealth is a demand for cryonic self-assurance — a very cold pastoral indeed. She will not sieze the day nor recapture the past, for to her time must remain meaningless. If such simultaneous imprisonment and preservation suggest less of Keats than of a fly in amber, Daisy probably would not protest. Such a creature endures, and has an unambiguous aesthetic and commercial value.

Fortunately, the ashen present manages at the last to offer Gatsby something more than wraiths and raw roses. The "shadow of a tree"

and its "ghostly birds" within the "gray-turning" day (p. 152) lend him something of his Platonism and past dream. Even when the extravagant dreamer's "Jay Gatsby" is at last replaced by the absolute man, he does not regret his commitment. He recalls that when he returned to Louisville after the war, the magic had drained from the places he and Daisy had shared. Nevertheless, he also remembers that the swiftly curving train that had then drawn him away from the curve of the setting sun had produced only a material loss in Einsteinian space and time. Despite his grievous mistakes about the direction, the green light at the summit of an aspiring Platonic ladder had not dimmed.

The immediate present, however, is "raw. . . material without being real" (p. 162). In its loveless world of ashes and wrecked machinery, Gatsby is killed by George Wilson. In one calculated stroke, Tom Buchanan has thus "carelessly" eliminated two outsiders from his square. When four men bring Gatsby from his almost unused pool, no flights of angels sing him to his rest, and his only melodious tear at the moment is "The poor son-of-a-bitch" (p. 176).

It remains for the novel to trace Nick's flat revocation of the East that had sacrificed Gatsby. He cuts his ties with Jordan Baker; with the foul dust of former hangers-on, who promptly forget that Jay ever lived; with Gatsby's biological father, more interested in the gaudy mansion than his unknown son; with a West Egg that has turned phosphorescent nightmare in which "no one knows. . . and no one cares," so that, predictably, "nobody came" to Jay's funeral (pp. 178, 175); and with the Buchanans, who smash things up and retreat (p. 180). If need be, the retreat can be confirmed by other Wolfsheimian cuff links and another enthralling white necklace. And yet, Nick eventually finds all "this part" of the story to be "unessential" (p. 165). He gives to Gatsby in death the "intense personal interest" that Gatsby had offered to people in life. Because he had offered Jay a living tribute and will write a kind of gospel of his life, he can walk calmly away from the obscene word scrawled on Gatsby's steps. Even though it is the last mote of foul dust in Gatsby's wake and the standard twentieth-century epitaph for the past, it is nothing "personal".

Electing his own version of the past-repeating, future-promising green light and line, Nick abandons all that the East has come to mean: as if it, along with its houses, were also unessential. The midwest "starting point" that had once seemed to be the "ragged edge of the universe"

(p. 3) now appears to be a land in which tradition and at least the past example of wonder may still have some currency. He is repeating earlier returns from the East during his college vacations.¹⁶ He thus not only will treasure but also in some way maintain the Dutch sailors' wonder at the essential New World. It is true that the land which was new to them then is now an "old, unknown world" (p. 182). Nevertheless, Nick is a Marlow, in his way. It is possible that in those dark fields he will rediscover something resembling a "fresh, green breast of the new world". Those fields may also have been among the green-lit places of the earth. If so, the "last time in history" when man met something "commensurate to his capacity for wonder" may be extensible, uniting the future with the past. Both Nick and Jay, at any rate, have proved equal to such "capacity for wonder" (p. 182), even though they have sojourned in the fallen world of Sodom and Gomorrah rather than in the true New World's green pastures.

Footnotes

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner's, 1953), pp. 111-112. Subsequent quotations from *The Great Gatsby*, all of which are taken from this edition, are identified by parenthetical page numbers in the text.
2. See A.E. Elmore, "Color and Cosmos in *The Great Gatsby*," *SR*, 78 (1970), 427-443; Robert E. Long, "A Note on Color Symbolism in *The Great Gatsby*," and Richard A. Burleson, "Color Imagery in *The Great Gatsby*," both in *Fitzgerald Newsletter*, ed. M.J. Brucoli (Washington, D.C.: Microcard Editions, 1969), pp. 83-84 and 290-291, respectively; David Parker, "*The Great Gatsby*: Two Versions of the Hero," *Eng. Studies*, 54 (1973), 46; and Milton R. Stern, *The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1970), pp. 270-284. For a related consideration of "infinite progression" as opposed to "infinite class," see L.A. Beaurline, "Ben Jonson and the Illusion of Completeness," *PMLA*, 84 (1969), 51.
3. Cf. Gale H. Carrithers, Jr., "Fitzgerald's Triumph," in *The Great Gatsby: a Study*, ed. Frederick J. Hoffman (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. 306.
4. Cf. Marius Bewley, *The Eccentric Design* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1959), p. 281.
5. Cf. Ernest Lockridge, "Introduction," *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby*, ed. Ernest Lockridge (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 17-18; John J. McNally, "Boats and Automobiles in *The Great Gatsby*: Symbols of Drift and Death," *Husson Review*, 5 (1971), 11-17; and Laurence E. MacPhee, "*The Great Gatsby's* 'Romance of Motoring': Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker," *MFS*, 18 (1972), 207-212.
6. For an analysis and diagram of this design, see Andre Le Vot, "The Great Gatsby," in *Francis Scott Fitzgerald* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1969), pp. 74-80. See also John W. Aldridge, "The Life of Gatsby," in *Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels*, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1958), p. 214; Henry Dan Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Critical Portrait* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 145; Sergio Perosa, *The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, tr. Charles Matz (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1965), pp. 61-64; Stern, *The Golden Moment*, p. 190; Victor A. Doyno, "Patterns in *The Great Gatsby*," *MFS*, 12 (1966-67), 415-426; and Kenneth Eble, *F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Twayne, 1963), p. 91.

7. Cf. Paul Lauter, "Plato's Stepchildren, Gatsby and Cohn," *MFS*, 9 (1963-64), 338-346; James E. Miller, Jr., *F. Scott Fitzgerald: His Art and His Technique* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1964), p. 118; Thomas Hanzo, "The Theme and the Narrator of 'The Great Gatsby,'" *MFS*, 2 (1965), 183-190; and J.S. Westbrook, "Nature and Optics in *The Great Gatsby*," *AL*, 32 (1960), 78-84. As will appear below, I view Nick more favorably than do those critics who charge him with deceit and ultimate retreat.
8. See further Frederick J. Hoffman, "Introduction," *The Great Gatsby: A Study* (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. 10; and Barry Gross, "Our Gatsby, Our Nick." *Centennial Review*, 14 (1970), 331-340.
9. Cf. Robert Emmet Long, "*The Great Gatsby* and the Tradition of Joseph Conrad," *TSLI*, 8 (1966), 422; Elmore, "Color and Cosmos," p. 443; and Charles T. Samuels, "The Greatness of 'Gatsby,'" *Mass. Review*, 7 (1966), 794.
10. Cf. Robert Sklar, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Last Laocoon* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), p. 175.
11. Cf. Bewley, *The Eccentric Design*, p. 283.
12. See also Harold Hurwitz, "*The Great Gatsby* and *Heart of Darkness*: The Confrontation Scenes," *Fitzgerald-Hemingway Annual*, ed. M.J. Bruccoli (Washington, D.C.: Microcard Editions, 1969), pp. 27-34.
13. For further discussion of Nick's perspectives, see E.F. Carlisle, "The Triple Vision of Nick Carraway," *MFS*, 11 (1965-1966), 361-360.
14. Cf. Joseph N. Riddel, "F. Scott Fitzgerald, the Jamesian Inheritance, and the Morality of Fiction," *MFS*, 11 (1965-1966), 331-350; especially, n. 12, p. 346.
15. Cf. Stern, *The Golden Moment*, pp. 168-227.
16. See Sklar, *The Last Laocoon*, p. 176, upon the novel's cycle of voyage and return. For a view in general dissent, see John Fraser, "Dust and Dreams and *The Great Gatsby*," *ELH*, 32 (1965), 554-564; and for views of Nick and Jay opposed to that of this essay, Richard Lehan, "Focus on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*: The Nowhere Hero," in *American Dreams, American Nightmares*, ed. David Madden (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Ill. Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 106-114, and Richard Foster, "The Way to Read *Gatsby*," in *Sense and Sensibility in Twentieth Century Writing*, ed. Brom Weber (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Ill. Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 94-108.