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Are the Rich Different?: Creating a Culture of Wealth in *The Great Gatsby*

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most noted phrases in American literary history concerning affluence and poverty is: "The whole idea of [*The Great*] *Gatsby* is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money" (150). According to literary biographer Andrew Turnbull in his biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the author of *The Great Gatsby*, this is what Fitzgerald told a friend. In this novel, published in 1925, the title character Jay Gatsby ends up failing to win the hand of a wealthy young woman named Daisy, whom he had desperately longed for as a poor boy, although he has accumulated wealth by the time of the story. Has Gatsby not become rich enough to marry Daisy? Do "poor" and "rich" imply more than the extent of one's money?

Fitzgerald provides a hint as to the answer of these questions in another well-known and often-cited statement he made in a conversation with Ernest Hemingway: "The very rich are different from us" (247), which was quoted in a classic argument by Lionel Trilling (1950). Hemingway is reported to have replied: "Yes, they have more money." Although Hemingway adapted this little exchange in his story, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936), apparently portraying Fitzgerald with a fictional name as the narrator/protagonist's friend with a weak personality, Trilling suggests that although

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Hemingway seems to have "the better of the encounter and quite settled the matter, we ought not be too sure." Placing this dialogue in juxtaposition with the questions above, we may note how Fitzgerald seems to find some of the rich different, not merely because of the amount of money that they possess.[1] Leading critics like Turnbull and Trilling thus set the stage for rendering wealth a key concept in the critical history of Fitzgerald's work. This short dialogue is often quoted in social science as well as in the literary field in discussions of the wealthy class. To give an example, social historian Alan Dawley considers this conversation to speak "volumes about class in America." He reads in it the inherent dilemma of wealth in the United States: "In a proudly democratic society, the very rich have no chance of ever acquiring a lordly mystique. And they enjoy powers and privileges that are the envy of kings" (149). Larry Samuel, meanwhile, declares in favor of Hemingway: "The democratization of wealth in America has diluted most of the social signifiers or markers of elitism—sense of privilege and entitlement, discreetness, understatedness, noblesse oblige, snobbery—that once were assigned to the rich" (5).

Both Samuel and Dawley refer to this exchange between these two literary figures when discussing the situation of the final stage of the long-lived development and expansion of the American economy from the post–Civil War era until the Great Crash of 1929. As the second generation of the rich had taken over before then and the number of the rich had increased along with the economic boom, discussions about the issue of the rich or class were provoked and intensified. The debate between Fitzgerald and Hemingway about whether the very rich are somehow "different" or simply have more money was considered by these scholars and others as representative of the discussion about the culture of wealth at that time.

In the following essay, I investigate how the concept of "the rich" was developed in the United States during the first three decades of the twentieth century; how the concept is illustrated in concrete words and behavior by the characters in *The Great Gatsby*; and finally how the development of the concept is observed, dealt with, and evaluated by a specific individual, the narrator of the novel, Nick Carraway. Fitzgerald may not give a definite answer to the question how the rich are different, but he may presumably exhibit through depictions of his character's words and behavior, how the question itself exerts influence on the American people and their culture.

I. CREATING AN AMERICAN CULTURE OF WEALTH

In his classic study on wealth, *The Affluent Society*, John Kenneth Galbraith claims: "The first requirement for an understanding of contemporary economic and social life is a clear view of the relation between events and the ideas which interpret them" (6). The reason he finds a gap between events and "the ideas which interpret them" is that "ideas come to be organized around what the community as a whole or particular audiences find acceptable" (7). Although Galbraith discusses how "ideas" are created in reference to the economic concepts of historical theorists, for instance, Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Robert Malthus, and Karl Marx, he also paraphrases the term as "the Conventional Wisdom" (8) to broaden the scope of the formula of "events and the idea which interpret them."

There are two events widely assumed to have occurred to the rich in the era of prolonged economic expansion in the United States for some sixty years from the nineteenth to the twentieth century: one is an increase in the number of the rich; another is the transformation of the members of this class. Both were brought about by the structural changes and escalating growth of the American economy. During the Civil War, northern manufacturers emerged as a new ruling class in a situation of accelerated economic expansion, with cyclical dips and recovery, while blessed with an enlarged territory, abundant natural resources, and a swelling population as a result of a surge of immigration. From the 1880s onward the economy had shifted into even higher gear, as monopolistic enterprises were born one after another through business mergers that accumulated an unprecedented amount of wealth that was automatically capitalized to bring about larger economic expansion.

This rapid growth of the economy that was sustained for a long time caused the rich to remarkably increase in number. Samuel introduces the number of millionaires according to their assets: there were only 3 in 1861 (7) but at least 30,000 in the months leading up to Black Friday in 1929 (12). Kevin Phillips follows the course of the rise in more detail: 4,092 in 1890, 5,000 in 1900, and 7,000 in 1914 (49); 5,000–7,000 in 1921, 15,000–20,000 in 1927, and 25,000–35,000 in 1929 (63). The acceleration of the increase in the number of the rich from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century is due not only to inflation, which is generally seen in the last stage of economic growth, but also to the stock market becoming easy to access and giving more chances to individuals to make a fortune. As its members expanded, the enlargement of the group diluted its traditional

values, beliefs, and typical modes of behavior. The democratization of the rich had started.

Another event concerning the rich in this age is the appearance of a subgroup of the class that is so wealthy as to not have to work, that is, the very rich. Their direct predecessors are those among the mid-nineteenth-century American manufacturers who built large enough fortunes to be able to be away from their plants and to live an idle life in comfort. Their accumulation of wealth was further accelerated later on through business consolidations that transmuted manufacturers to business owners by means of stock holding. The sites for this group to make a fortune moved from smokestack mills to Wall Street, where they were joined by the other rich who amassed their wealth solely by investments and speculations. Thorstein Veblen calls such rich people the "leisure class" identifying them as "exempt or excluded from industrial occupations" (1). By looking at it this way Veblen puts emphasis on relations with production. But as the purpose of my essay is not to attack the modern rich but to explore events and ideas pertaining to them, "indolence" or "quiescence" rather do seem to properly express their situation. Consequently, the class exempt from and excluded from work, to distinguish it from the "leisure class" as Veblen identifies it, is here called the "idle class."

When the rich were democratized as their number increased and some of them turned to form the idle class, how were these events interpreted by the rich themselves? An idea well-accepted among the first generation of the idle class in the United States was one of self-justification through Herbert Spencer's theory of social Darwinism. As Galbraith observes, "the rise of Social Darwinism in the United States coincided with the rise of the great fortunes" (50), referring to John D. Rockefeller's words: "The growth of a large business is merely the survival of the fittest" (51). As their justifications by social Darwinism apparently did not resonate very much with the public, the upper part of the rich were generally perceived as greedy robber barons as seen in their portrayal by muckrakers or even by the government of the United States through various regulations enacted in the era.

Such raw justification based on Darwin was unpopular, but the idea with some revision prevailed among the Christian rich. According to social historian David Nasaw, the same people who praised the survival of the fittest, as seen in the above quote by John D. Rockefeller, "would attribute their financial success to God, who . . . had blessed them with riches because they had followed his teachings" (127), the gist of which, in principle, is faith in an enormous power: God in this case; Law in scientific terms. Henry Ward

Beecher, one of the most eloquent and influential Christian preachers in that era, is said to have preached "a gospel of virtuous wealth as a commendable moral example to the poor" (Marsden 23). Beecher was not a theologian, but he helped Christian churches to adjust to the secular transformation of modern times. The idea that the wealthy can enter Paradise is a radical revision of the Christian doctrine that "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (KJV Matthew 19:24). It took as long as the next century before the idea took root in the larger American society.

As the first generation gave way to the next during the first several decades of the twentieth century, the younger rich responded to the situation by "creating new cultural values and institutions" (181), as social historian Jackson Lears puts it. Samuel also notices this response by the new generation, saying, "Twentieth-century plutocrats adopted a new collective person" (11). In what way were they developing "new cultural values" or a "new collective person"? Both observations interestingly pay attention to the same concept, work, which the idle class evades by nature. According to Lears, they "used the managerial ethos" for their new values, which included "leadership in business and public life" (182). Samuel, meanwhile, points out, quoting examples of the younger generation finding jobs after the war, remarking on "the pronounced work ethic among the new generation of rich that emerged after the Great War" (52). As a result, Galbraith observed that: "In modern times and especially in the United States, the leisure class, at least as an easily identifiable phenomenon, has disappeared. To be idle is no longer considered rewarding or even entirely respectable" (248). "This new plutocracy," Samuel summarizes, "held values similar to those of the average American, rooted in Christianity and a solid work ethic" (49).

"Much has changed . . . since Fitzgerald famously observed in 1925 that the rich were different" (5), Samuel says, and, as a result, "most notably, democratization of wealth in America has diluted most of the social signifiers or markers of elitism . . . that once were assigned to the rich." However, a new border was naturally sought to exclusively install around the class, which was to form effectually a new culture for the wealthy class. Prep schools, clubs, and colleges exclusively for ruling-class families were established in the early twentieth century. But as crucial is the fact that, as Lears points out, "alongside the meritocratic impulse toward openness there was an equally powerful tendency toward ethnocentrism and attachment to invented Anglophile traditions" (183).

These two significant events concerning the rich—the birth and democra-

tization of the idle class and the ideas that interpreted them and introduced a new work ethic and exclusiveness—intertwined and created a culture of wealth marked by the coexistence of inclusiveness and exclusiveness that lasted through the 1920s. Fitzgerald presented specific individuals in such a situation, their beliefs and behaviors that represented their interpretations of the situation, and in this way he participated in creating an American culture of wealth in that era.[2]

II. THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CULTURE OF WEALTH IN *THE GREAT GATSBY*

To discuss the idle class in *The Great Gatsby* it is necessary, first and foremost, to make clear whether the two significant characters, narrator Nick Carraway and principal character Jay Gatsby, belong to that class or not, because the former is a first-person narrator and the latter is rich for the moment though it is dubious as to whether he belongs to the class or not. In making that decision, it helps to refer to Fitzgerald's later story "The Rich Boy" (1926), in which he more directly presents his ideas concerning the rich.

In this story, Fitzgerald presents a detailed explanation of how the rich are different. The narrator describes a very rich boy, Anson Hunter:

> Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me. They possess and enjoy early, and it does something to them, makes them soft where we are hard and cynical where we are trustful, in a way that, unless you were born rich, it is very difficult to understand. They think, deep in their hearts, that they are better than we are because we had to discover the compensations and refuges of life for ourselves. Even when they enter deep into our world or sink below us, they still think that they are better than we are. (5)

This passage makes a clear affirmation of the idea that the very rich are different from others by saying the rich are "difficult to understand" unless you are not one of them, and it presents what he considers to be their persistent belief that they are better than others. This belief of their privileged advantage should be noted as well in discussing the rich in *The Great Gatsby*.

Self-awareness of his own inherent privilege is what Nick finds in "enormously wealthy" (8) Tom Buchanan: "'Now, don't think my opinion on these matters is final,' he [Tom] seemed to say, 'just because I'm stronger and more of a man than you are'" (9). Although this is, of course, Nick's impression, these two superrich persons have a boastful decency in common as can be seen in that Nick has been taught by his father: "'Whenever you

feel like criticizing anyone,' he told me, 'just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had' " (5). He also introduces himself by saying: "My family have been prominent, well-to-do people in this middle-western city for three generations. The Carraways are something of a clan and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch" (6). Nick certainly belongs to the idle class and applies a tenet of the class taught by his father to Tom Buchanan.

As far as the narrator goes, it should not be missed that he works despite his rich family. There is no doubt that what has motivated him to work on Wall Street is a popular idea among the rich along with the democratization of the class as surveyed above. He sets to work not for his livelihood but because "everybody I knew was in the bond business" and "the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe" (6). In addition, a model member of the class, Anson Hunter, in "The Rich Boy," works as a stockbroker as well. Nick's obsession with working reveals his sensitivity to the latest trend in the circumstances of his class. It should be noted, therefore, that the whole story of *Gatsby* is narrated in terms of the contemporary idle class with critical self-observation.[3]

Who, then, is Jay Gatsby? Although he has built an enormous fortune and shows how much he possesses at every opportunity, it is doubtful that he is entitled to membership in the idle class. For he appears to work hard and is repeatedly seen busy with answering business telephone calls. Even with his mansion, parties, automobiles, and other extravagances, Gatsby cannot possibly be classified as one of those in the idle class. Literary critic Walter Benn Michaels notes Gatsby's excessive lust for Daisy from the romantic viewpoint: "The fact that he [Gatsby] is, when they first meet, 'penniless' hardly presents itself as an obstacle . . . because it can be—and quickly is—overcome. The real problem is that he is 'without a past' and to get Daisy he must get a past" (26). His associating the "past" here with "genealogy, a matter of 'ancestors' " and the ethnic biases of modernist literature is certainly reasonable in a sense. In the context of this essay, however, Gatsby's absurd craving for her love even to the extent of trying to "get" a past should be read as his chronic diffidence about his qualification for being a member of the idle class, as members of the class ought to be confident in their privileged advantages as are Anson, Tom, and Nick. Jay Gatsby is presented as the hero of a love romance unable to be accepted as a member of the idle class.

Given the assumption that the hero is unable to marry a girl in a different class, to see why she refuses him clarifies her beliefs and behavior as stem-

ming from her class. The phrase, "difficult to understand," quoted above from "The Rich Boy," provides a key to the reason why Gatsby is rejected by Daisy. Although narrated memoirs of their romance, either by Jordan Baker (59–62), a close friend of Daisy, or even by Gatsby himself (115–18), do not indicate how Gatsby's former poverty led Daisy to marry Tom Buchanan instead of him, Gatsby explains the reason by saying, "because I was poor" (102). Gatsby has consequently built a gorgeous mansion and frequently gives extravagant parities there, watching for a chance to invite Daisy over to show her what he has achieved.

When Gatsby finally shows his stately house, Daisy rightly responds by saying, "I love it, but I don't see how you live there all alone" (71), implying that the people with whom he associates are important, not the house in which he lives. To this comment, which he probably did not expect, Gatsby gives an inept reply that the house is kept full of interesting and celebrated people, which is irrelevant to his qualification for Daisy's class because Daisy is not from the class of the "interesting" or "celebrated." When he invites her to a party full of the interesting and celebrated, she is "appalled" by the people there and "she saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand" (84). This is, of course, an observation made by Nick, but he shows his confidence in his insight into Daisy's mind by stating that when he looks at it "through Daisy's eyes," he "felt unpleasantness in the air, a pervading harshness that hadn't been there before" (81). She must realize at the moment that what she belongs to cannot possibly agree with what Gatsby does belong to. Though her husband's observation, made with a conscious sense of superiority, that "a lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers" (84) must call her attention to these kinds of people, she says in their defense, "at least they're more interesting." But the narrator does not overlook her doubt, immediately adding, "she said with an effort," and Tom does not miss it either, saying to her, "You didn't look so interested."

Daisy's failure to understand the people around Gatsby is noticeable not only to the persons in her class but to Gatsby as well. After Daisy and the other guests leave the party, Gatsby admits that "she didn't like it" and "she didn't have a good time" (85). It is clear that he realizes here that she was appalled by the people at his party, but his stance turns equivocal: " 'I feel far away from her,' he said. 'It's hard to make her understand.' " What ought to be the explanation for why she does not understand has been transformed by his wishes to the idea that she should delete her love for Tom from her past life as well as the present one and start over from the beginning with him. His plan is unveiled to narrator Nick, and the reader that "after she was

free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago" (86). When challenged, he asserts: "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously, "Why of course you can!" (86). This obstinateness of Gatsby would finally extract Daisy's confession, "I love you now—isn't that enough? I can't help what's past" (103). She is being driven to the position of being a victim of Gatsby's unrealistic love, but unless he attempts the impossible, would she really marry him despite their class difference?

III. IDEAS ACCEPTABLE TO THE CLASS: DAISY'S CASE

As far as Daisy is concerned, her utterances and behavior should be examined with sensitive consideration due to the narrator's very limited view, as is minutely pointed out by literary critic Sarah Beebe Fryer. What she argues, assuming the narrator's viewpoint is limited, is that the limit of the scope of his view makes him fail "to perceive the things that make Daisy do the things she does" (154). Her argument focuses on the gender bias of the narrator, but Fryer also effectively discloses that Daisy's real motivation behind what she does is her need for stability and security. She has been raised in a very rich Southern family and is supposed to belong to the idle class and has learned to abide by its code of behavior. In the past she certainly has done as she has been taught ending in a row with her family over her love affair with Gatsby, marrying instead Tom Buchanan, and rejecting Gatsby's new proposal later in New York. She ends up retreating into stability and security, as Fryer interprets. But this theory also applies to her love for Gatsby at the beginning when she was innocent of how she was supposed to behave, which Fryer misses, as follows.

What has induced Daisy to be attracted to Gatsby is said to be his difference from all her other suitors observed by Gatsby himself: "She thought I knew a lot" (117). This might have secured for her, an eighteen-year-old girl, the stability of a mature protector. But the actuality is merely that Gatsby "knew different things from her," as he continues. Daisy does not realize that what he knows is different, not only from what young girls like her know, but also from what eligible suitors in her class know, until she finds out later at Gatsby's party who his kind of people are. What Daisy considers to be "stability" in her younger days is later discovered to be in reality a production of Gatsby's class and not hers. The stability Daisy seeks seems to be related to the values of her class. Then what kind of stability does Daisy want to maintain?

While Gatsby was away in the war, "she wanted her life shaped now, immediately—and the decision must be made by some force—of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality—that was close at hand" (118). It should be noticed that money, or even love, is listed as only one of the alternatives that could protect her. At the moment, "the force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan." What she is longing for is neither passionate romance nor extravagant luxury but a still and calm life. Once settled in New York after leaving Chicago, tainted by her husband's scandal, Daisy assures Nick over the telephone that "this was a permanent move" (9). What she is expecting herself to do is to stand stasis. Although she is to suffer once more from her husband's infidelity, she does not "rush out of the house, child in arms," as Nick observes, and "apparently there were no such intentions in her head" (19). She seems to him to hope for eventless days. Finally, after the fatal accident of Myrtle Wilson, Daisy is witnessed by Nick seated by Tom and giving him occasional nods. The narrator here reads the air between the couple, reporting, "They weren't happy . . . and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture" (113). Whether happy or unhappy, Daisy seemingly hopes to resume a life of "indolence or quiescence," as Veblen would put it.

The stability Daisy craves is not dominance, celebrity, or indulgence, but stillness, calm, inaction, or changelessness, that is, a condition found in an idle life within a secure room. This condition that she wishes to be immersed in is represented in the first scene where Daisy appears. When Nick visits the Buchanans, he is brought by Tom into a parlor and this sight is presented before him:

> The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. . . . Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor. (10)

This spectacular view of Daisy and her intimate friend Jordan Baker is interpreted in Daisy's terse but expressive lament: "I'm p-paralyzed with happiness" (11). Daisy's every statement needs to be scrutinized to take her dissembling into account, especially from the viewpoint of gender as Fryer points out. Yet in the scope of this discussion of the idle class, this ostensibly unfit combination of paralysis and happiness eloquently expresses her content with a calm, idle life: to be unable to move is to be happy. Of

course, the idle life is not always a happy one, as Jordan symbolically complains, "I've been lying on that sofa for as long as I can remember" (12). And as Daisy apologetically says, "I've been trying to get you to New York all afternoon"—once in a while they resort to stimuli in order to bear their idleness. The same goes for the fact that Tom, who does not have any job at all, keeps a string of polo ponies, runs after extramarital love affairs, and attends various society parties. The idle life presented here is at once a privilege—to be idle by evading labor—and a burden—to bear such idleness. This modest desire of Daisy, to be idle well, represents with specific details an idea of wealth acceptable to the idle class that is ignored in general discussions of the rich.[4]

IV. AN IDEA ACCEPTABLE TO THE PUBLIC: NICK'S CASE

All things considered thus far, *The Great Gatsby* vividly depicts the contemporary culture of wealth. It is a story of the wealthy class—Daisy, Tom, and Nick—and an aspirant—Gatsby. The setting, in which the first two live luxurious lives without toil and sweat and the last one "drift[s] coolly out of nowhere and buy[s] a palace on Long Island Sound" (41), represents the two events concerning the wealthy class in that era, as previously mentioned: the emergence of the idle class and the democratization of the rich. The third one of the above, Nick, serves as intermediate as he attempts to work and also can appreciate Gatsby. While this new work ethic for the wealthy was apparently introduced to appease criticism of the natural idleness of their position, Daisy's strong feelings toward an idle life represents a candid interpretation of her class attitude. This whole world full of events in the lives of the idle class is interpreted and construed by the narrator, Nick Carraway. The view of the class as seen by Nick is Fitzgerald's attempt to show a specific instance of the class consciousness of the era by way of fiction.

When the focus is on the narrator, the plot revolves around the development of his evaluation of Gatsby: how "Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (5–6) "turned out all right at the end" (6), as he puts it at the outset. Considered in the context of the culture of wealth discussed earlier, this plot could also be expressed as how Nick as a member of the idle class has accepted Gatsby, who is a parvenu, into it. But the route of this change of mind is not a straight one.

Before he meets Gatsby, Nick is trying to get a job, despite the prominence of his well-to-do family. He is of the generation of the rich who have started doing so to weather the storm of the democratizing of their class. In

addition, when Tom inquires of Nick about a rumor of his engagement, he denies it with an unexpected expression, "I'm too poor" (19), which is an echo of what Gatsby offers as a reason why Daisy married Tom instead of him: "because I was poor" (102). Apparently by identifying himself as "poor" in spite of his privileged position, Nick is trying to show his will to stand by someone whom he believes he should accept as a symbol of democratization.

But Gatsby, probably the first case of this democratization that Nick meets, initially looks like he will disappoint him, for Nick is surprised and put off by his shallowness:

> I had talked with him perhaps half a dozen times in the past month and found, to my disappointment, that he had little to say. So my first impression, that he was a person of some undefined consequence, had gradually faded and he had become simply the proprietor of an elaborate roadhouse next door. (51)

When Gatsby describes his invention of his life, Nick manages to restrain his laughter and has an image evoked of "a turbaned 'character' leaking sawdust at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (52).

But he recovers himself soon and is back to being a champion of democratization by contemplating the unlimited power of New York as he views it from the Queensboro Bridge: "'Anything can happen now that we're slid over this bridge,' I thought; 'anything at all. . . .' Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder" (55). For New York is, to Nick and in the context of the culture of wealth, the financial sector, the center of the American economy, which is promoting the democratization of the wealthy class by augmenting its numbers through its structural changes. Nick's fancy of the city here is leading to his approval of Gatsby as a symbol of this democratization.

Another cause of his softening toward Gatsby is that Nick discerns within Gatsby some other things than just "sawdust" after listening to his theory of "repeat[ing] the past":

> Through all he [Gatsby] said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. 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. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was uncommunicable forever. (87)

What "he said" is how he met Daisy, fell in love with her, and had to leave. And what is "appallingly sentimental" is his strong conviction that he can "repeat the past," that is, redo his past love. But what Nick is trying to express by "something" or "a phrase" might possibly include something else beyond that romantic point of view. Taking into account that Nick at first sympathizes with Gatsby and the context of the culture of wealth, "something" here could possibly be about the class system at the moment of its transformation that Nick also seeks to take part in. Nick exposes his intention to make himself appear as a champion of the democratization of the rich.

Nick's third rapprochement with Gatsby takes place at the climax of the story. After the fatal accident in which Myrtle Wilson is killed, Nick talks to Gatsby over the course of the night. When they separate the next morning, Gatsby observes hopefully, "I suppose Daisy'll call" (120), to which Nick replies, "I suppose so," and, trying to consoling him, adds: " 'They're a rotten crowd,' I shouted across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together.' " Nick wants to assure Gatsby of his support, implying that "they", including Daisy, will discard Gatsby.

This last sympathetic approach to Gatsby is, in fact, distorted unlike the previous two, for later Nick comments on it without disguise, "I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it [that a call from Daisy] would come, and perhaps he no longer cared" (126), although there are no factual grounds supporting Nick's assumption, including Gatsby's own testimony. Gatsby is still confident of Daisy's love for him, but Nick not only doubts it he also has doubts about Gatsby's confidence. On the contrary, this alleged concession on the part of Gatsby of the loss of Daisy further arouses Nick's imagination and he supposes that just before Gatsby is murdered by George Wilson:

> He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about . . . like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding toward him through the amorphous trees (126).

Considering how he has persistently been a man of excessive optimism and, therefore, of bright illusion, this is the last vision Gatsby would conjure up. Isn't he a man with "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness" (6) as Nick himself puts it? What causes Nick to assemble a totally new figure of Gatsby with a grotesque and raw vision of the world?

This vision is assumed to haunt Gatsby at his mansion's private pool in the morning before he is shot by George Wilson. Nick may use this as an evil omen of the final ruin of Gatsby. But this vision also reveals another meaning, for Nick has foreshadowed it earlier in the novel:

> Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio, with their interminable inquisitions which spared only the children and the very old—even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg, especially, still figures in my more fantastic dreams. I see it as a night scene by El Greco: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky and a lustreless moon (137).

There are two places in the New York area mentioned here: "the East," which must mean Wall Street that Nick is said to have been excited about, and West Egg, which is nothing but Gatsby's world that Daisy is "appalled by" (84). Nick virtually admits in this passage that he has found it distorted or grotesque to work on Wall Street and to associate with Gatsby, both of which are embodiments of the democratization of the rich Nick has come to New York to take part in. In other words, he concedes here that he has failed in establishing himself as a leading figure of the movement he has wished to be part of. Even so, why does he imagine Gatsby's mind to be similar to his own?

When Gatsby is on the way to his fatal moment with the grotesque and raw scene allegedly in his mind, Nick is on Wall Street: "Up in the city, I tried for a while to list the quotations on an interminable amount of stock, then I fell asleep in my swivel-chair" (120). Although he is naturally sleepy after his all-night talk with Gatsby, it must be remembered that there is a distinctive significance to his working: he does not necessarily have to work in terms of his well-to-do family, but he works to participate in creating a new culture of wealth.

He not only works hard from morning till night, as he says that "most of the time I work" (46), but he also studies hard as well. After work, he does not immediately come home but "[takes] dinner usually at the Yale Club . . . and then [goes] up-stairs to the library and studie[s] investments and securities for a conscientious hour" (46). Back at home he studies additionally as "I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities, and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like new money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew" (7). It is therefore strange that for all he has studied so

hard and deep about the financial industries and market, he ends up only "list[ing] the quotations on an interminable amount of stock" at the office. There is too large a gap between what he has tried to master and what he appears to be required to do. It would be rather strange if he should not be disappointed. The reason Nick leaves New York is contrived to be Gatsby's death, as is explained in the following manner: "After Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction. So . . . I decided to come back home" (137). The story is certainly narrated in such a way as to conclude with Gatsby's loss of his dream and life, but Nick himself is significantly disappointed with his time spent on Wall Street.

When we look at the three episodes of Nick's empathy with Gatsby, his strong interest in him while he must be busy working and studying on Wall Street, it can be seen that his interest is caused by his ambitious participation in creating a new culture of wealth. That is why Gatsby's death, meaning the abortion of part of this significant undertaking, should fall at the moment when Nick suffers another setback on Wall Street and that his own vision of despair is projected onto Gatsby's mind at the time of his death. The very thing Nick has failed to become part of is, in fact, the acceptable one to the public.

V. WHAT NICK ENVISIONS AT THE CONCLUSION

The novel concludes with a vision attributed to the first generation of New York Dutch: "And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world" (140). At the end, Nick also professes that "we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (141). Nick's last words pay respect to the earliest immigrants from western Europe as well as to his own reactionary resolution that well represents the ruling-class consciousness instilled in him. After he has failed in his work and in his efforts to properly appreciate Gatsby, this conclusion means that he not only avows his failure to ride the wave of democratization of his class but he also turns his back on democratization itself. Nick, however, tries to fabricate an impression that Gatsby shares the same consciousness as his own class by saying, "As I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock" (140). To take it a step further, Nick gives the appearance in

his narration that he is sympathetic to someone outside his own class and that he has an open-mindedness that Tom and Daisy do not have. But is Nick really different from them in their words and behavior toward Gatsby?

While Daisy tries to keep herself within a closed, idle life, although with a deeply repressed agony, Tom is apparently aware of the new trend of his class. Tom invites Nick to visit at the opening of the story probably because he is seeking to have a chance to exchange views on the new trend of the rich, assuming that Nick knew this trend because he "wrote a series of very solemn and obvious editorials for the 'Yale News'" (7) and because "he [Tom] approved of me [Nick] and wanted me to like him" (9) during their college days. Tom's sudden mention of ethnocentric notions to Nick, "This idea is that we're Nordics" (14) or "Next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white" (101) seems to be intended to show Nick that he is not in favor of the current trends. Since the turn of the century, the wealthy had faced a dilemma in how to revitalize their class, how to open their territory to outsiders to bring in fresh vitality by adopting a meritocracy and how, at the same time, to secure their supreme positions. Neither of Tom's remarks makes any sense in their contexts, but Nick reads behind them his sense of the impending crisis growing in his class as a whole, when he comments about Tom, "Something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart" (19). Tom certainly desires to maintain his privileged circumstances, but he instinctively senses that a transition is taking place behind his back. As far as Nick is concerned, the reader can discern his ethnocentrism earlier. Once he drops his disgust for Gatsby, Nick finds New York powerful enough to bring out Gatsby as he is. In terms of the culture of wealth and Nick within it, New York is the center of its democratization where he serves as a member of the movement. But the case is more complicated. Between seeing the city "in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world" (55) and coming up with the idea that "even Gatsby could happen," Nick catches sight of persons "with the tragic eyes and short upper lips of southeastern Europe" and "three modish negroes" with their "white chauffeur," possibly among many more whites who go unmentioned. The reason occurring to Nick why Gatsby "could happen," therefore, could not only be that the rich have been democratized but possibly that New York has become multiethnic. Gatsby is seemingly of western European origin, but the people Nick is noticing here, consciously or not, are those outsiders excluded by the ethnocentric consciousness of the ruling class. At this moment Nick is not so far from Tom.

Nick is also from the idle class and conscious somewhere in his mind that he is similar to Tom in his ethnocentrism. He has tried working on Wall Street as his contemporary open-minded rich fellows do, but he has become discouraged and quit. More than that, he has developed and maintained empathy with Gatsby, regarding him as a would-be beneficiary of the democratization of his class. But as Gatsby's dream is aborted, Nick comes back to the class consciousness and ethnocentrism that he shares with Tom when he recalls the whole story at the end.

Then why is Nick able to blame Tom when he says, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy" (139)? Nick explicates to the reader just before this reproachful sentence on their carelessness, saying about Tom, "I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused." Nick's claim is that Tom does not have the qualms of a conscience. He is annoyed with Tom and Daisy for only seeing the new wave of the culture of wealth as a threat. Although Nick has quit his job and revealed his ethnocentrism, which may be only a few steps away from Tom with his idle life and arrogant class consciousness, he stands far away from Tom in his distress over the challenges he faces in trying to ride on the new trend. That could be why he calls them "careless."

The purpose for which Nick produces the story of Jay Gatsby seems to be to distinguish himself within the idle class from such members as Tom or Daisy who are not ready for its movement toward democratization of the rich and to show his own open-mindedness by means of a sympathetic narrative about Gatsby, even if Wall Street, where he has hoped he could participate in the movement, has disappointed him. Although he has not portrayed "a collective person" of the new trend, as Lears puts it, as adopted by the contemporary plutocrats, Nick is presumably among the majority of the rich in those days, who don't in fact enjoy great success on Wall Street and graciously cultivate a way to fit the new movement of democratization of the wealth. *The Great Gatsby* is an enjoyable narrative of a specific individual, Nick Carraway, living amid the emerging new culture of wealth in the 1920s. But to see the fictional life of an idle class hero who lives squarely facing the new currents we must wait until the following year when Fitzgerald brings forth Anson Hunter in "The Rich Boy."

NOTES

[1] It is not clear exactly what Fitzgerald means by "very rich," "rich," and "well-to-do," in terms of actual income, assets, or percent of population, not only from his novels and stories

but also in his other writing including letters, notes, and so on. As I do not intend to study wealthy culture in terms of social science but to examine how a specific person, Fitzgerald, explores it from a viewpoint of a specific character, narrator Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, I would not dare to define the terms in this article.

[2] It should be made clear that, while the history of the rich in the modern United States is only roughly surveyed in this article, the term "idle class" as used here does not refer to any specific generation of the wealthy but indicates those who are wealthy enough to not have to work in modern industrialized societies, who can be found at the top tier of each generation of the rich classes, even now, and are not necessarily without jobs. The reason such a group is focused on here is that Fitzgerald was clearly obsessed by identifying how the "very rich" are different because the drastic increase in the numbers of the class seemed to him to be affecting his contemporary culture and he found "work" matters to how they are different, as is discussed later.

[3] Who belongs to the wealthy class and who does not in this novel are problematic, especially about Nick. For example, Long disapproves of Nick as "a member of the Buchanan's set, having nothing like their wealth" (106), while Johnson finds him an aristocrat as much as the Buchanans, having contacts to help him find a position on Wall Street (9). But the idle class as we term here is identified by being without need to work and Nick, like Anson Hunter in "The Rich Boy," does not work for money because both have a wealthy family background, although Nick modestly calls his family just well-to-do, which Gatsby never had. Keath Fraser interestingly suggests that Nick might be concealing or escaping from something that "the narrator of 'The Rich Boy' calls abnormality," finding Nick's self-analysis at the opening of the novel a means to "[lull] us into accepting his own protestation of being 'normal' " (142). To Fraser, this something is about sexuality, but according to the story of "The Rich Boy," it is more reasonable to believe it is about the difference of the rich. In addition, his modest life and work in New York are not considered concealments, as Fraser might have considered, but Nick's version of democratization of the rich as discussed here.

[4] It deserves mention that Daisy's features as a member of the class listed in this argument correspond to "the image of the sheltered and repressed southern woman," the so-called southern belle, as identified by Seidel (31). In the context of this argument, however, focusing on the fact that Daisy evidently reveals class consciousness even against Gatsby and his world as is observed here, her belle character shall be left aside in this article. Meanwhile, considering that southern planters are the first generation that nurtured the idle class as termed here, it is probable to find some relationship between the southern belle character in Daisy and the idea of the idle class she belongs to, but this requires an entire study of its own.

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