

JOSEPH CORSO

ONE NOT-FORGOTTEN
SUMMER NIGHT:
SOURCES FOR FICTIONAL
SYMBOLS OF AMERICAN
CHARACTER IN *The Great Gatsby*

“One day I was out in the Bay when I noticed a handsome, big yacht had come into the harbor—one of the finest I’d ever seen and, with a kid’s curiosity, I made for it.

“I noticed they’d run it in so the stern was up and I realized that when the tide ran out, as it was sure to do, the yacht would tilt more and more and probably break in two. So I rowed along side and yelled to one of the crew, “Hey, Mister, you’re going to break your boat!”

The Captain waved the boy away, but the owner told the boy to come on board.

“What do you do?” he asked, and I told him.

“How’d you like to work for me?” he next asked. ‘I’ll give you \$25 a week.’”

"I was barefoot and in old clothes, tanned and dirty. . . . I had only old clothes at the beach . . . so he took me to Jim Bell's . . . and had me outfitted completely, with blue coat with brass buttons and white flannels. O, it was great!"

These curiously familiar recollections might belong to a diary account by James Gatz of North Dakota, or to a draft of the scene F. Scott Fitzgerald put into Chapter VI of *The Great Gatsby*. But they are from a *Great Neck News* account of the adventures of fourteen-year-old Robert Crozier Kerr, Jr., on Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn, New York. The year is 1907 and the yacht belonged to Edward Robinson Gilman, general manager of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company, among other things, of 23 Cliff Street, Brooklyn, New York.

Bob Kerr was a Great Neck resident who became Fitzgerald's friend during 1922-23. Kerr, a jeweler, philanthropist, singer, piano player, and engaging personality, exchanged stories with Fitzgerald, one of which the author immortalized. That situation, which will be dealt with in detail in section II below, is a vivid illustration of how Fitzgerald utilized such phenomena in his fiction. Like the pearl-bearing Mollusk, Fitzgerald absorbed the life flowing around him, particularly on the North Shore of Long Island in 1923, to help formulate characterizations and settings in his fiction.

Fitzgerald, in his own writings, alluded to the various influences on his fiction. With regard to *Gatsby*, he was very explicit. The most famous example is the notes he wrote on the endpaper of Andre Malraux's *Man's Hope* in 1938:

- I. Glamor of Rumsies & Hitchcocks
- II. Ash Heaps Memory of 125th Gt Neck
- III. Goddards Dwanns Swopes
- IV. A. Vegetable days in N.Y.
- B. Memory of Ginevras Wedding
- V. The Meeting all an invention. Mary.
- VI. Bob Kerr's story. The 2nd Party.
- VII. The Day in New York
- VIII. The Murder (inv.)
- IX. Funeral an invention

Fitzgerald had ruminated over the sources he recalled for the highlights of each chapter. However, until now, the meaning of the reference to chapter six, "Bob Kerr's story," was not known.



Robert C. Kerr, Jr. Courtesy of Doris Kerr Brown.

I. *The Four Faces of James Gatz*

A. The early youth of James Gatz belongs partially to Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald of St. Paul, Minnesota. Fitzgerald's own life provided the idea for his attribution to Gatsby of the belief that he "sprang from his platonic conception of himself." This idea was developed in Fitzgerald's first attempt at a third novel, a piece which, in substance, became the story "Absolution," published in June 1924 in *The American Mercury*. Its young protagonist is a Dakota farm boy named Rudolph Miller who had, as Fitzgerald had once done (see Fitzgerald's *Ledger*, p. 162), lied in confession. While talking to a priest, Father Schwartz, and attempting to tell of his mortal sin, Rudolph also confesses the following:

"Of—of not believing I was the son of my parents."

"What?" The interrogation was distinctly startled.

"Of not believing that I was the son of my parents."

"Why not?"

"Oh, just pride," answered the penitent airily.

"You mean you were too good to be the son of your parents?"

"Yes, Father."

Years later, in a piece called "Author's House," Fitzgerald has an autobiographical character write in remembrance of "my first childish love of myself, my belief that I would never die like other people, and that I wasn't the son of my parents but the son of a king, a king who ruled the world."

B. It is with the second face of James Gatz that the amalgam of his early life begins to solidify. Fitzgerald introduces us to James Gatz as a restless youth from North Dakota who eschewed an education at St. Olaf Lutheran College for the promise of the open road.

In a letter to John Jamieson, dated 15 April 1934, Fitzgerald said in reference to Gatsby:

He was perhaps created on the image of some forgotten farm type of

Minnesota that I have known and forgotten, and associated at the same moment with some sense of romance. It might interest you to know that a story of mine, called "Absolution," in my book *All The Sad Young Men* was intended to be a picture of his early life, but that I cut it because I preferred to preserve the sense of mystery.¹

There is evidence, however circumstantial, which points to a well-known Minnesotan who may have been the "farm type" from Dakota who attended St. Olaf College that Fitzgerald fused into the second face of young James Gatz. Old Edvart Rölvaag, (1876-1931), the Norwegian-American novelist, best remembered for his *Giants In The Earth*, appears to be the prime candidate.

Leaving his life in a fishing fleet, the adventurous Rölvaag sailed from Norway for New York in 1896, the year of Fitzgerald's birth, and eventually crossed westward to work on a relative's farm in South Dakota. Working there, he earned enough money to continue his education. He attended St. Olaf College, the Lutheran school in Northfield, Minnesota. Rölvaag did so well that he went from student to faculty member one year after his graduation in 1905. While all his fiction was originally written in Norwegian, one of the subjects he taught at St. Olaf, and an English translation of his works did not appear until the spring of 1926, Rölvaag was widely read and famous throughout Minnesota and the Middle West. He died in 1931, and his fiction today is usually relegated to the Middle-West schoolroom. That Fitzgerald knew of Rölvaag seems very likely, and that Rölvaag served some purpose in the creation of the young James Gatz as far as the "Dakota" and "St. Olaf" elements are concerned is quite possible.

C. The next face of Gatsby is the seventeen-year-old tramp searching for his fortune on the shores of Lake Superior in Michigan.

In June 1975, The Great Neck Library sponsored an exhibition entitled "F. Scott Fitzgerald And Great Neck In The 1920's." I had the honor and pleasure of contributing to the exhibition and addressing Great Neck residents one evening on the subject. On the last night of the exhibition, I was talking with various people when I was approached by two women. One of them introduced herself, and after confirming that I was Mr. Corso, she introduced the other:

"Mr. Corso, I would like you to meet the daughter of The Great Gatsby."

In fact, I had been introduced to the charming Mrs. Doris Brown, daughter of Robert C. Kerr, Jr., who as a child grew up amidst the zany

doings in Great Neck during the Roaring Twenties. The exhibition had brought Mrs. Brown out with some memorabilia that had once belonged to her father. She produced for me several documents which not only illuminate Fitzgerald's reference to "Bob Kerr's story," but provide significant insights into the creative process in the making of "Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island."

The most significant is Fitzgerald's letter to Kerr, the date of which can be placed around July 1924, when the Fitzgeralds were living at the Villa Marie in St. Raphael, France. This letter has not been previously published and appears now with the kind permission of Mrs. Brown.

Great Neck—I mean
St. Raphael, France
Villa Marie

Dear Bob:

Thanks for your letter & for selling the membership many thanks indeed. One hundred and fifty is more than I expected. I hope some time that I may be able to return the favor.

The part of what you told me which I am including in my novel is the ship, yacht I mean, & the mysterious yachtsman whose mistress was Nellie Bly. I have my hero occupy the same position you did & obtain it in the same way. I am calling him Robert B. Kerr instead of Robert C. Kerr to conceal his identity (this is a joke—I wanted to give you a scare. His name is Gatsby).

Best to you all from all of us and again thanks enormously for your courtesy & your trouble.

Sincerely,

Scott Fitzg —

The reference in the first paragraph is to Fitzgerald's membership in a local country club. The balance of the letter reveals that Kerr had related to Fitzgerald a story about a yacht and a "mysterious yachtsman whose mistress was Nellie Bly."

To further clarify her father's story, Mrs. Brown produced an inscribed first edition of *Gatsby*, as well as clippings from two Great

Grand Hotel — Duceau
St. Raphael, France
Katie Marie

Dear Bob:

Thanks for your letter + for calling the membership many
thanks indeed. One hundred was fifty is more than I expected.
I hope some time that I may be able to return the favor.

The part of what you told me which I am including
in my novel is the ship, yacht Duceau, + the mysterious
patroness whose mistress was Katie Oly. I have my
hero occupy the same position you did + obtain in
the same way. I am calling him Robert B. Kerr instead
of Robert C. Kerr to conceal his identity (this is a joke —
I wanted to give you a scare. His name is Gatsby).

Best to you all from all of us once again thanks
enormously for your courtesy + your trouble.

Sincerely
Scott Fitzgerald

Neck newspaper articles.² Around April of 1925, Fitzgerald sent Bob Kerr a copy of *Gatsby*, acknowledging his debt to Kerr once again. The inscription reads:

Dear Bob:

Keep reading and you'll finally come
to your own adventures which you told to
me one not-forgotten summer night.

Your Friend

F. Scott Fitzgerald

According to the first news article, Kerr met up with a Major Edwin R. Gilman in Sheepshead Bay almost exactly the way James Gatz met with Dan Cody in Little Girl's Bay on Lake Superior. The second article³ paraphrases some of the first but further states:

Yes sir, it was regular Horatio Alger stuff. . . . That was "From Rags to Riches" for fair, from a dirty dory to an immaculate yacht. Bob Kerr lived on board the boat acting as his employer's secretary for three and a half years, until Mr. Gilman died. At that time he was getting \$75 a week and found. In time he developed his skill at the piano and in singing. Mr. Gilman had a fine entertainer as well as secretary on board. Also the youth had a fine training in business.

The stories do contain a number of inaccuracies, which I shall set straight when I discuss the "Three Faces of Dan Cody" below.

Before we leave the young *Gatsby*, there is one other matter worth exploring. We are told in *Gatsby* that James Gatz had left behind him an old copy of a book called *Hopalong Cassidy* in which is inscribed the date September 12, 1906, followed by a number of resolutions the young Gatz was presumably laboring to keep. The behavior associated with these resolutions belonged to the influence of the dime-novel adventures of Horatio Alger (à la Bob Kerr) and Frank Merriwell. As a teen-ager, James Gatz, like thousands of American male youths around the turn of the century was reading publications called dime novels, particularly one called *Hopalong Cassidy*. Why did Fitzgerald choose the *Cassidy* book and not one of those of the well-known adventurers of the time to comment on the American character of

James Gatz? It seems clear that Fitzgerald saw in *Cassidy* an association with the illusory romantic American West which served to symbolize the milieu in which James Gatz was spinning his own dreams. This was the milieu later to be alloyed with Dan Cody's—that of the real American West of savage violence.

Fitzgerald was probably familiar with Clarence E. Mulford's novels about the American West, although he may never have actually read any. His citing of *Cassidy* with relation to 1906 is an error, since Mulford did not publish his novel of that name until early 1910. The first novel in which Cassidy appeared was Mulford's *Bar-20* of 1907, but it was in *Hopalong Cassidy* that Mulford's new character came into his own. Mulford, who was never west of Chicago until 1924, published twenty-seven volumes in which Cassidy appeared, including two published in 1924: *Rustler's Valley* and *Cassidy Returns*.

The significance of the *Cassidy* reference is in the fact that it serves to expose the whole area of the dime novel to review—that medium which was responsible for creating in American youth so many illusions and myths about Democracy and the American character emerging from the pioneer west. E. F. Bleiler, an authority on the American dime novel, has made observations remarkably relevant to Fitzgerald's purpose in *Gatsby* in his introduction to *Eight Dime Novels*:

During the years of its heyday . . . the dime novel permeated young America, molding folkways in the same manner that television does today. It influenced the popular stage, and in turn was counter-influenced. Its plots affected the early movies. . . . They also offered a picture, perhaps distorted, of what was going on in otherwise inaccessible parts of the country. . . .

The dime novels also reflected and served to reinforce the general cultural "myths" of the period: the ambivalence felt toward the successful criminal; admiration for the violent egotist; worship of physical strength; the Puritan ethic about wealth; the upward dynamism of progress; the righteousness of expansion; and a simplistic morality.⁴

D. The mature Jay Gatsby owes much to the personalities of two people, one of whom was, again, Fitzgerald himself. The other, we now know for certain, was Max Gerlach, a bootlegger whom Fitzgerald knew in and around Great Neck in 1922-24. Matthew J. Bruccoli has published his discoveries concerning Max Gerlach who used the term "old sport" in his conversation. But long before we knew the man's

CRABS AND KEDGE ANCHORS GAVE R. C. KERR, JR. BIG START AT 14

A Brooklyn Boy and Spent Vacations at Sheephead Bay—Showed Major Edwin R. Gilman He Knew About Yachts—Furious Routes to Maiden Lane—Gives His Two Reasons for Success

By DORIS FLEESON

REMEMBER as I Saw Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," just a novel, which the great author wrote in Great Neck and which these pages brought to the stage, that Gatsby did not being picked up in a baronet but along the coast by a tall, pale man who took him about with him ever where for a few days.

"You see," said Robert C. Kerr, Jr., in the other room, is talking of his early days "that and a more 'famous' one evening and I told him what I'm telling you."

"I know just that story I ought to have the whole story—Jensen, well-known member of the very same R.C.K. Jr., of the beautiful beach house on the hill on Cedar Drive, the Estates, and at No. 17 Maiden Lane diamonds, jewelry and silversware."

"I was born in Brooklyn, October 7, 1897," Mr. Kerr told me. "I went to public school and to high school. There wasn't much money in my family and so we attended night with high school. I began as office boy for the American Shavers Company and graduated into senior office boy for J. Charles O'Brien, Brooklyn real estate broker."

"Then I was a messenger-boy in the Brooklyn Edison Company where I was promoted to assistant secretary to the Vice-President."

"In the Summer I'd spend my two weeks vacation at Sheephead Bay, with the folks. You know, that's where the old famous race-track was and it was a great amusement place in those days."

"I was still just a kid and I'd always seen baseball and Summers here, played around with the boys and fished a bit. Well, one of my friends was a real scotchball crabs and set them to all the eating places thereabouts. It's quite a tricky trade and I made good money if it for I was pretty skillful—sometimes \$10 and \$14 a week, which was real money for me then."

"One day I was out in the Bay when I spotted a handsome, big yacht had come into the harbor—one of the finest I'd ever seen and with a kid's curiosity, I made for it."

"I noticed they'd run it in so the stern ran me and I realized that when the tide ran out, as it was sure to do, the yacht would sit more and more and probably break in two. So I rowed alongside and pulled to one of the crew, 'Hey, Mister, you're going to break your boat!'"

"He told me to 'beat it' and then I saw the captain and repeated my advice. He looked the sailor in ordering me away when the latter appeared. He called out, 'What does the boy want?'"

"And I being a 'book kid' said, 'Mister, here's going to break your boat in ten minutes. You're too late to put down today's orders!'"

"I'm not out. What are today's orders?" he called, as I explained. (Mr. Kerr had to explain to us, here. Also, they told the stern that on the boat, someone was over here.)

"You've ordered the crew to put down the today's orders and ordered me about. 'What do you do,' he asked, and I told him."

"There's one like to give, the crew to get down. 'Put down \$20 a week. I thought I should be sure my \$10 was paid for that."



An interesting and intimate view of the well-known trio, the Bob Kerrs and Doris, in the living room of their charming home on the hill on Cedar Drive, the Estates. It's no longer that Mr. Kerr bought in 1922 when, during it, Doris Kerr five months after he saw the "The Main" sign. What has brought him on of our most prominent and best that family who are hard-working members of the Kerrs who a very long story which we'll soon tell you'll be interested to read about. (By GERMAINE KILLERMAN)

"That," continued Mr. Kerr, "Major Edwin R. Gilman, for it was he, lived his necessary. "I was barefoot and in old clothes (tanned and dirty). I remember that he drove me home in his car—a Thomas Flyer—and my mother came running out, scared to death."

"That was your ride in one of those six-moiler, 'Bob Kerr's' she told me. "I only had old clothes at the beach and the Major wanted me to start at once so he took me to Jim Hill's—be sure you'll remember that—and had Pitti Averara's big tailor then—and had my suit made completely with blue coat with brass buttons and white flannels. Oh, it was great!"

And that's what Mr. Kerr did from

1906 to 1908. It was Major Gilman's business to inspect contractors—he was in the regular army service—and the pair traveled all over and up and down the coast in the Major's yacht.

"Major Gilman died in 1908 and I had to fare forth in quest of another job. I sold Blue-Java plants for a year, the first gas Long Island had, and I covered the island's scrub plants, a lot of 'em in Great Neck. Then I went into the automotive business and was Sales Manager for the Duxton Demonstrable Horse Company in the days when sales were entirely unorganized."

"When the Kerrses stopped their own cars, that business failed again. I be-

came a jewelry salesman for Dinges & Cline and after a year had an opportunity to buy into a firm established for fifty years, John H. Murphy, Inc., and I became President of that."

"I resigned after eight years and in 1922 went into business for myself. I had studied gemology at Columbia for two years and worked to perfect myself in the jewelry business."

It seems strange to talk to Mr. Kerr for so many paragraphs and not mention

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The Great Neck News—unlocated clipping, c. 1929. Courtesy of Doris Kerr Brown.

identity, Fitzgerald had alluded to him in correspondence with his editor at Scribner's, Maxwell Perkins:

I myself didn't know what Gatsby looked like or was engaged in & you felt it. If I'd known & kept it from you you'd have been too impressed with my knowledge to protest. This is a complicated idea but I'm sure you'll understand. But I know now—and as a penalty for not having known first, in other words to make sure, I'm going to tell more.

It seems of almost mystical significance to me that you thought he was older—the man I had in mind, half unconsciously, *was* older (a specific individual) and evidently, without so much as a definite word, I conveyed the fact. Or rather I must qualify this Shaw Desmond trash by saying that I conveyed it without a word that I can at present and for the life of me trace.⁵

This is further emphasized in a letter Fitzgerald wrote to John Peale Bishop in August 1925:

Also you are right about Gatsby being blurred and patchy. I never at any one time saw him clear myself—for he started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself—the amalgam was never complete in my mind.⁶

Ultimately, of course, a significant aspect of the young man called Jay Gatsby was derived from the psyche of the author. Fitzgerald had a fascination with the self-made man, as well as with the romantic with "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life . . . an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness. . . ." The months in Great Neck had given Fitzgerald the opportunity to shape the experience of his twenty-seven years into the microcosm of East Egg and West Egg life; the opportunity to sum up his own disillusionment with the American Dream against the backdrop of the northeast, examining symbolically three centuries of American history during one short summer of 1922.

II. *The Three Faces of Dan Cody*

A. Of course, like most other lovers of *Gatsby*, I had noted the obvious relationship between Dan Cody and Colonel William F. Cody, the famous "Buffalo Bill" of the American West. That Fitzge-

rald intended such an association with his “pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon,” is apparent.

It should be noted that William F. Cody spent many years traveling throughout Minnesota, appearing particularly in Minneapolis and Duluth. In fact, Cody owned property in Duluth, an estate he named “Codyview” and kept from 1899–1910. His sister, Wellie Cody Westmore lived there. Today in Duluth there is a Cody Street commemorating the Colonel. It was to Duluth from Lake Superior that Dan Cody took James Gatz “and bought him a blue coat, six pairs of white duck trousers, and a yachting cap.” For the geographically curious, there is a spot on the Michigan end of Lake Superior called Little Girls Point. According to Mr. Ray Maurin, of the Ironwood Area Historical Society of Ironwood, Michigan, Little Girls Point “. . . has no bay. There is no way any yacht could anchor in this place. There is no marina at Little Girls Point. It is just a river mouth into Lake Superior with no anchoring facilities.”

Fitzgerald was careless at times about facts of nature and locality. In one draft of *Gatsby* he had the hero “standing on the shore” watching the *Tuolomee* and seeing that the “very dressy little ship was going to be broken up by the tide within two hours.” This was true of the yacht in Sheepshead Bay, but not at all true of Lake Superior where there are no tides, as Ring Lardner pointed out in a list of corrections he provided Maxwell Perkins after reading the proof of the novel.

B. I was surprised to learn that there once was a real Dan Cody. There are two references to this Dan Cody in print. The first, somewhat veiled, is in Fitzgerald’s *Ledger*, appearing on page 177 under 1923 which reads: “March-Sold This Side of Paradise and South to Montgomery. Dapper Dan. The Whitfields. . . .” The second reference appears in Sara Mayfield’s *Exiles From Paradise*, in which we learn that Dan Cody was one of Montgomery’s most eligible and well-to-do bachelors in 1919 and also one of Zelda Sayre’s favorite beaux. In fact, Dan Cody, a strikingly handsome young man, had been one of several beaux pressing Zelda for her hand in 1919 when she had temporarily broken her engagement with Fitzgerald. By March 1923, Dan Cody had married and the visit by the Fitzgeralds was presumably cordial; but in retrospect, Fitzgerald may have linked Dan Cody of Montgomery, Alabama to the “pioneer debauchee” in *Gatsby*, not just because the allusion to Cody suited the situation but because, psychologically, the wealthy Dan Cody of Montgomery represented someone rich who



Dan Cody, 1920. Courtesy of Miss Virginia Cody.

almost stole Zelda from Fitzgerald, just as surely as Tom Buchanan of Chicago was to steal Daisy Fay of Louisville from Jay Gatsby. The reference seems to have been intended to edify one person: Scott Fitzgerald.

C. And then there was "Major Edwin R. Gilman." As I stated above, the newspaper accounts of this man attributed to Bob Kerr were not entirely accurate. For one thing, Edward Robinson Gilman was not an army Major, although he did have a commission as a Second Lieutenant from West Point in 1885.⁷ Gilman was born in Pennsylvania on 13 October 1863. His West Point biography reads as follows:

He was the son of the late Colonel Jeremiah H. Gilman, of the Class of 1856, and was appointed to the Military Academy from Maine, his father's native state. He entered the Academy July 1, 1881, graduated June 13, 1885, and was thereupon appointed Second Lieutenant, Fifth Infantry. He joined his regiment at Fort Keogh, Montana.

He resigned in June, 1888, to enter business at St. Paul, Minnesota, as representative of the Thompson-Houston Electric Company (now General Electric Company) and established a large and prosperous business for his company in the Northwest.

In 1890 or 1891 he went to Chicago and there organized the Great Western Electric Supply Co., of which he was president and general manager. In the financial panic in 1893 the company went out of business. Following this he took up his residence in New York City, and for a time was connected with the Merriam Publishing Co. and in promoting various concerns. In 1899 he was employed to re-organize the Iron Clad Manufacturing Co. of Brooklyn, N.Y., of which he became general manager in 1900 and later, also of the American Steel Barrel Co. With these two he remained until his death.

He was Democratic candidate for Congress from the Sixth District of New York in 1908 and was defeated. The nomination again was offered to him in the fall of 1910, but his health made acceptance impossible.

Mr. Gilman was a member of the Army and Navy Club and Lawyers' Club of New York City, New York Yacht Club, The Canarsie Yacht Club, The Automobile Club of America and the Aero Club. He was vice-president of the Brooklyn Democratic Club and president of the Waterway League of Greater New York and Long Island.

He never married, and was buried beside his father and mother, at Kensico, N.Y.

His sister Katherine, (the wife of Dr. John E. MacKenty of New York City), survives him.

Edward Gilman was a self-made man, very successful and well-known along the east coast of America, and prior to his death on 9 February 1911, at Sheepshead Bay, he apparently had some relationship with that most famous of early female reporters, Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman, popularly known as Nellie Bly. The only allusion to the alleged liaison we have is Fitzgerald's, in his letter to Bob Kerr. Presumably, had Gilman and Mrs. Seaman been having an affair, Kerr would have been privy to it in his capacity of secretary to Gilman. Now we can fully understand Fitzgerald's reference to "Ella Kaye, the newspaper woman" in *Gatsby*, and why her relationship with Cody would have been "common knowledge to the turgid sub or suppressed journalism of 1902." However, there are no references to it in books and articles on Nellie Bly published over the last 53 years, since her death on 27 January 1922 at St. Marks Hospital in New York.

Elizabeth Cochrane, like Gilman, was born in Pennsylvania, and it was she, as a reporter for the *New York World*, who made headlines with her exposé in 1887 of the lunatic asylum on Blackwell's Island (later Welfare, now Roosevelt Island, and the same one Nick Carraway alludes to in Chapter IV of *Gatsby*). Her greatest claim to fame, though, was her trip around the world, alone, from 14 November 1889 until 25 January 1890. The trip lasted a bit more than 72 days, breaking the fictional trip of Jules Verne's Phineas Fogg. She was greeted first in Jersey City and then elsewhere in America with the hoopla accorded today's astronauts. In 1895 at the age of 28, somewhat inexplicably, she married Robert L. Seaman, a Brooklyn manufacturer, who was over 70 years old at the time. That the marriage raised eyebrows is quite likely. In fact, it was not long before newspaper stories cast shadows over the relationship between Nellie Bly and her husband. The *New York Times* printed the following article on 10 November 1895, less than six months after the wedding:

Robert Seaman, old and a millionaire, married Elizabeth Cochrane better known as "Nellie Bly" last Spring. Mrs. Seaman last night caused the arrest of Robert Hanson, Superintendent of a private detective agency in Catskill, N.Y.



Edward R. Gilman, c. 1903. Courtesy of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point.

Hanson, in a cab, had been following Mrs. Seaman, also in a cab, the greater part of the day. He said, when he was arrested at Thirty-fourth Street and Broadway, that he had been employed by Mr. Seaman to follow Mrs. Seaman. He made a note of her every stopping place.

After the arrest, Mrs. Seaman called to her driver "Barney! To the Imperial Hotel!"

Her husband, whose home is at 15 West Thirty-seventh Street went to the West Thirtieth Street Station and gave bail for Hanson.

This story indicates two significant things: first, that Seaman had suspicions concerning Nellie's behavior and secondly, that the Seamans may not have been living together. However, not all the controversy surrounded Nellie, as is indicated in another *Times* article printed on 24 November 1895:

Chicago. Nov. 23. The litigation between L. H. Bisbee, a Chicago Attorney, and Robert Seaman, the New York millionaire, and husband of "Nellie Bly," involving the recovery of \$50,000 from the lawyer, assumed a sensational phase yesterday in the Court of Master in Chancery Leaming, before whom evidence is being taken.

In a long cross-examination conducted for the millionaire, Mr. Bisbee stated that he visited New York in 1887 and effected a settlement between Mr. Seaman and Ernestine Sanderson who claimed to be Mr. Seaman's common-law wife, whereby the woman was to go away and cease to be a burden upon his mind. The defendant said he had a verbal agreement with the millionaire that his services in effecting a release of the woman's claims were to liquidate any amount of money for which Mr. Seaman might hold Mr. Bisbee's notes.

John C. Patterson, counsel for Mr. Seaman, was surprised at the revelation of the "woman in the case." Mr. Bisbee said Mr. Seaman deeded property to the woman, and a lot of jewels, and that Mr. Seaman agreed to relinquish all claims against the defendant on the further payment of \$5,000.

How and when Nellie Bly and Edward Gilman met is not yet known, but we do know from the *New York Times* obituary for Nellie Bly on

28 January 1922, the following: "In 1895 she married Robert L. Seaman, forty years her senior, President of the American Steel Barrel Company and the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company." This is a confirmation of what appears in another *New York Times* article announcing Seaman's death in March of 1904:

Robert Seaman, President of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company, died yesterday at his home, 15 West Thirty-seventh Street. Mr. Seaman, who was eighty years old, was knocked down by a horse three weeks ago, and died from the injuries received. Mr. Seaman's wife was with him at the time of his death. She was Miss Elizabeth Cochran, and was widely known at the time of marriage in 1895 as "Nellie Bly." Mr. Seaman was at one time a Director of the Merchant's National Bank.

It was noted above that in 1899 Edward Gilman "was employed to reorganize the Iron Clad Manufacturing Co. of Brooklyn, N.Y., of which he became general manager in 1900 and later, also of the American Steel Barrel Co." We may surmise from this information that by 1899 or 1900 Gilman and Mrs. Seaman had met. Whether this was their first contact remains unknown. Gilman came to New York City around 1894 and could have known Nellie Bly before her marriage. It is also possible that he and Nellie were the source of Robert Seaman's concern in November 1895, but it is not likely that Seaman would trust and hire Gilman several years later if he knew of any such affair.

When Robert Seaman died in 1904, very advanced in age and blind, Elizabeth Seaman was still young at 38 and Gilman was 40. Their liaison probably peaked between then and 1910. We know that he declined to run for Congress out of New York in 1910 because "his health made acceptance impossible," and he must have been inactive during the last year or so of his life. This was not the "physically robust" Dan Cody of *Gatsby* but could have been the Dan Cody "on the verge of soft-mindedness. . . ." On the other hand, Fitzgerald may have been aware, possibly through Bob Kerr, that Robert Seaman was extremely infirm and blind during his last years, although it was an accident which killed him, and that there was a struggle over the estate left by Seaman. In fact, two wills were set forth within months of his death. According to *New York Times* articles of 17 June and 2 September 1904, Nellie Bly was able to make claim to everything Seaman left:

The will of Robert Seaman was filed yesterday in the office of the



The New York WORLD'S Correspondent,
who placed a Giraffe Round the Earth in 72 Days, 6 Hours, and 11 Minutes.

Nov. 14th, 1889—Jan. 20th, 1890.

SUPPLEMENT—THE WORLD, N. Y., FEB. 2, 1890, VOL. 10, NO. 10,200

Surrogate. He leaves the bulk of his estate, of which the value is not stated, though it was believed to be large, to his widow, Elizabeth C. Seaman, and some nephews, grand-nephews, and grand-nieces. He makes bequests of shares of stock in the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company to a number of its employes.

To Sarah Fawcett, who was "in his household," he leaves \$10,000; to a friend, Ester A. Savage, \$15,000; to Ernestine Sanderson, \$5,000; to Catherine B. Lockwood, \$5,000.

His grand-nieces, Arlisle and Nellie Young, will each receive \$10,000, and the residuary estate will go to his nephew, William H. Seaman and his nieces, Elizabeth S. Johns and Emma S. Bennet. Mr. Seaman's wife was once a newspaper woman known as "Nellie Bly."

Through her counsel, Robert W. Hardle, Mrs. Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman, also known as "Nellie Bly," widow of Robert Seaman, who died on March 11, last, filed a second will executed by Mr. Seaman on November 29, 1897, in the Surrogate's office yesterday. This will leaves all the property to the widow.

On June 16 last David Otis, an executor and residuary legatee of Robert Seaman, filed a will bearing date of December 24, 1895, in which Mrs. Seaman got only the bulk of the estate, specific bequests being left to a nephew, two nieces, and several grand-nephews and grand-nieces, amounting to \$80,000. The second will is dated in Wiesbaden, Germany.

These circumstances indicate that Seaman made the first will out shortly after the incident with Nellie and the detective in November of that same year. It also provides the setting for what Fitzgerald may have had in mind when he alluded to Ella Kaye's attempts at separating Dan Cody from his wealth. The second will, which was made in Germany during one of several trips the Seamans are known to have made early in their marriage, gave Nellie full control of Seaman's fortune upon his death. Seaman was 73 at the time and was experiencing approaching blindness. It is not difficult to imagine Nellie working her will on the aged millionaire, resulting in her becoming the sole beneficiary of his estate. The will reads:

I give and bequeath all my property personal and real of any kind and in any place whatsoever to my wife Elizabeth C. Seaman and hereby appoint her sole Executrix.
This is my Last Will and Testament.

Robert Seaman

Witnessed:

Carl Ebbighausen

Alfred Raab

Wiesbaden 29 November 1897

The interesting circumstance concerning this will is that its authenticity was contested by Seaman's relatives, those who had been cut out altogether. However, it was not until 21 May 1909 that the Honorable Abner C. Thomas, Surrogate for Manhattan County, ruled the following:

Now, therefore, upon all the papers and proceedings herein, it is hereby Ordered Adjudged and Decreed that said instrument purporting to be the last will and Testament of said Robert Seaman deceased bearing date the 29th day of November, 1897 was properly executed and is genuine and valid; that the said Robert Seaman at the time of the execution of said instrument was in all respects competent to execute the same and was not under restraint or undue influence. . . .

Nellie had attempted to assume her husband's responsibilities during his incapacity before death, with the help, no doubt, of Edward Gilman. However, by the time the estate was settled and Gilman had himself died, Nellie had had little success with her properties. Her obituary in the *New York Times* of 28 January 1922 reads:

. . . on Mr. Seaman's death . . . she took entire charge of the properties. Luck turned against her, however, and a series of forgeries by her employes, disputes of various sorts, bankruptcy and a mass of vexations and costly litigation swallowed up Nellie Bly's fortune, however, and she returned to journalism with her old spirit. At the time of her death she was a member of the staff of the *New York Evening Journal*.

The one aspect of this situation that remains unclear is what Gilman's

role in the operation of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company was between Seaman's death and his own.⁸ We are told in his West Point biography that he remained with the company until he died. However, the fact that Seaman's estate was not finally settled until May of 1909 indicates that the problems Nellie had with her husband's fortune and businesses may not have begun until after Gilman was already terminally ill, or perhaps, after his death in 1911. It is not likely that the businesses would have faltered while Gilman, an astute businessman, was still alive and managing them. It is also probable that the years between Seaman's death and Gilman's (1904-1911) were those when the relationship was stabilized and young Bob Kerr learned of it. Since Kerr allegedly spent the three and one-half years prior to Gilman's death on Gilman's yacht, it is likely that the affair was either still a fact or was waning during the last part of the same period. The known facts in the matter, when compared with Kerr's story, tend to substantiate Kerr's thorough knowledge of the situation, an awareness due perhaps to Gilman's trust or Kerr's alertness, or both.

It is purely coincidental, I believe, that Gilman was employed in Saint Paul, Minnesota when Edward Fitzgerald and Mollie McQuilgan were married there in 1890; but it is nonetheless interesting to note that both mentor and parent of Gatsby and Fitzgerald were salesmen in the Middle West (Gilman with the Thompson-Houston Electric Company, and Fitzgerald with the American Rattan & Willow Works and Proctor & Gamble) who came east to New York (Gilman to New York City and Fitzgerald to Buffalo), one to succeed and one to fail.

D. The remaining elements of the Dan Cody characterization are interesting in themselves for their elucidation of another aspect of *Gatsby*. I noted earlier that Gilman's yacht was allegedly called the *Kemah*, although this appears to have been a fabrication on Kerr's part. Whatever its actual name, Fitzgerald chose the name *Tuolomee* for Dan Cody's yacht. It was an apt choice since Tuolumne County in California was the scene of considerable gold mining in the 1850's and 1860's. But the key to understanding Fitzgerald's choice lies in the awareness that Mark Twain once lived in a mining camp on Jackass Hill in Tuolumne County, which he wrote about in *Roughing It*. Fitzgerald was probably also aware of a much publicized event which took place at Jackass Hill on 10 June 1922 while he was at Dellwood Lake in Minnesota. The *St. Paul Dispatch* was the only Minnesota paper to carry the story, headlining the A.P. dispatch "TWIN'S CABIN DEDICATED. Author Lived in Shack During California Gold Rush." The *New York Times* story did make mention of the fact

that William D. Stephens, Governor of California, dedicated the sight as a landmark in Tuolumne County. But the other significant aspect of this matter is the fact that the largest gold mine south of the town of Tuolumne is the *Buchanan* Mine which has yielded over \$2 million. Fitzgerald may have intended a link between the fortune of Dan Cody and the wealth associated with the Buchanan family of Chicago.

III. Tommy Hitchcock, Allan Dwan, The Wilsons, Daisy, Jordan, and The Owl-Eyed Man

Back in Great Neck, New York where Fitzgerald lived at 6 Gateway Drive in the Great Neck Estates, the social life was thriving, and from October 1922 to May 1924, Fitzgerald absorbed much that was subsequently reflected in *Gatsby*.

To begin with, in the list in Malraux's book, Fitzgerald attributes elements of the Buchanans' high life in Chapter I to the "Glamor of Rumsies and Hitchcocks." Charles Cary Rumsey and Tommy Hitchcock, Jr. had large estates in Old Westbury, Long Island (actually, Thomas Hitchcock, Sr. was still alive at the time), and Hitchcock was noted as one of the country's best polo players at age 23. He and Fitzgerald were friendly, and in a letter to his daughter Scottie in 1939, Fitzgerald praised Hitchcock:

... who came back from England in 1919 already a newspaper hero in his escapes from Germany and the greatest polo player in the world—and went up to Harvard in the same year to become *a freshman*—because he had the humility to ask himself "Do I know anything?" That combination is what forever will put him in my pantheon of heroes.⁹

It is not too difficult to see how Tom Buchanan became a polo player, nor how the young military hero Jay Gatsby went to Oxford after the war. Tommy Hitchcock was one of the few very wealthy people Fitzgerald was close to in his lifetime, and one that along with Gerald Murphy, Fitzgerald admired.

The first party at Gatsby's in Chapter III was one Fitzgerald created out of experiences he had at those given by the "Goddards. Dwanns. Swopes." Movie director Alan Dwan and editor Herbert Bayard Swope were well-known personalities of the 1920's, but the Goddard alluded to is not. For the record, Charles Harold Goddard, like Bob Kerr, was a Great Neck Estates neighbor of Fitzgerald's. Goddard had

large real estate holdings, and he and his wife Grace lived with their two children and five servants in a large home a couple of blocks from Fitzgerald's place. With regard to Dwan, there is a good possibility that he was the model for the movie director referred to in the scene at Gatsby's second party in Chapter VI. Dwan was working very closely at that time with Gloria Swanson. An entry for July 1923 in the *Ledger* reads "Parties at Allan Dwanns. Gloria Swanson and the movie crowd."

On the subject of Daisy and her friend Jordan Baker, I suggest a connection with Father Fay. Jordan Baker's Aunt in *Gatsby* is Mrs. Sigourney Howard, and Daisy Buchanan's maiden name is Fay. One of Fitzgerald's early and most influential mentors was Monsignor Sigourney Fay; he was used for a character in *This Side of Paradise*.

Finally, we come to the Owl-Eyed man we meet twice in *Gatsby*. As I previously suggested to the audience in Great Neck at the Fitzgerald Exhibition, my belief is that the Owl-Eyed man was based on Ring Lardner, Fitzgerald's only close friend in Great Neck. That Lardner and Fitzgerald shared a taste for literature, practical jokes, and liquor while together in Great Neck is a matter of record. It is also true that Lardner was one of the few people to have read, contributed to and otherwise criticized the proofs of *Gatsby*. There is some evidence that the men shared certain of the ideas on the American character seen in *Gatsby*.

The reference to "owl eyes" is one clearly associated with Lardner: it was a nickname he picked up while following the White Sox in Chicago as a sportswriter during the early 1900's—the team that Meyer Wolfshiem fixed.

This concludes a first examination of some of the experiences of Scott Fitzgerald, spanning the first 27 years of his life, which helped shape *The Great Gatsby*. It seems fitting in this Bicentennial year, the year in which we will celebrate the 80th anniversary of Fitzgerald's birth, that we can say with more certainty and understanding of his great American novel, "So that's what he was thinking—that's what was on his mind when he wrote it." The creative process is a bit clearer. If nothing else, I hope that I have conveyed with some clarity how this literary genius took the many disparate elements of his time and forged a fable that remains the most compelling examination of the illusion-studded ethos of the American Republic written to date.

¹*The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Andrew Turnbull. New York: Scribners, 1963, p. 509.

²Doris Fleeson, "Crabs and Kedge Anchors Gave R. C. Kerr, Jr. Big Start At 14," undated clipping from the *Great Neck News*; John Yard, *Duograph*, undated pamphlet published by the *Great Neck News*.

³The second article includes the following pertinent material:

When Bob was fourteen, his parents had a dory at Sheepshead Bay. One day he was rowing into Sheepshead Bay inlet when he saw the famous schooner yacht "Kemah" stranded on a bar. He yelled to those on deck to get out a kedge anchor from the mast or the craft would break in two. The captain waved the boy away but the owner, Edwin R. Gilman, then President of the Guarantee Trust Company, told the boy to come on board.

Bob put out the kedge anchor where he thought it should be and then Mr. Gilman wanted to know all about him.

⁴New York: Dover, 1974.

⁵*Letters*, pp. 172-173.

⁶*Letters*, p. 358.

⁷Besides the discrepancies in first name and military rank, the Kerr articles include the following errors:

- A. The reference to Gilman's being the President of the Guarantee Trust Company. Sources at the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, 15 Broad Street, N.Y., advised that Alexander J. Hemphill, not Gilman was the company's leader during the period in question.
- B. The reference to Gilman's owning the yacht *Kemah*. Based on research by Ms. Elsa Resnick, Reference Librarian at the Great Neck Library in New York, the yacht *Kemah* was owned by Thomas Alsop of Connecticut in 1908 and 1909. The ship was built in 1906 and was first named *America*, a fact which along with the other points appears in *Lloyd's Register of American Yachts*.
- C. The reference to Gilman's death in 1909. Edward R. Gilman died on 9 February 1911 of carcinoma of the prostate and chronic hepatitis at his home in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, N.Y.
- D. The reference to Gilman's occupation as a canteen inspector for the Army. All factual information known about Edward R. Gilman establishes that he left the military in 1888 and was involved in numerous business ventures until his death. The reference to canteen inspection is either a complete fabrication or there may be a remote chance that the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company produced canteens under a government contract.

⁸For the record, Edward Gilman did not appear to benefit in any unusual way from his position with Seaman's companies or his relationship to Nellie Bly. Gilman never became an officer of Seaman's companies, and at the time of his death in 1911, he left less than \$1,000 in his estate. There was a search for his will but none was found. In May, 1913, Letter of Administration were granted to J. Holly Clark, Jr. of Flushing, N.Y. who had a claim of \$330.22 against Gilman's estate. Clark had assumed the bill due the Stephen Merritt Burial and Cremation Company for materials furnished and services rendered for Gilman's funeral. It appears that Gilman and Nellie Bly may have ended their liaison or that Nellie could not come forth at the time of Seaman's death. In any event, since Clark and Gilman's survivors could not locate a will, Clark's petition was granted and the matter closed. Strange as it may seem, Edward Gilman was nearly poor when he died.

⁹*Letters*, p. 49.

Great Gatsby's Ghost: Resurrecting Fitzgerald and His Masterpiece

There is a single word in English charged with essential meaning for billions of peoples on the Earth: Resurrection! This restoration of life from death can be both literal and figurative. In religious doctrine, the belief in the literal resurrection of the biblical Jesus is the cornerstone of Christianity. In figurative or metaphorical terms, other kinds abound: for example, literary resurrections. Most famously, that of F. Scott Fitzgerald and especially his novel *The Great Gatsby*. In literary circles, resurrection represents the reevaluation of a writer's reputation and her/his work. Indeed, Fitzgerald/*Gatsby* have risen from the grave!

Fitzgerald died in 1940 at the age of 44, believing he was a failure as a writer, relegated to the dustbin of history. But something happened during World War II to change that, culminating in an international centennial celebration of *Gatsby's* publication, 10 April 2025. The novel is now heralded as a best-selling masterpiece of fiction by a great American writer. Fitzgerald's daughter Scotty lived to see it happen, along with her three children who have survived her.

During the 1930s "Pocket Books" in cheap, pulp editions of classic and contemporary fiction/nonfiction emerged in Europe. This concept was applied to the American Armed Services Editions (AASE) of pocket-sized books provided to military personnel between 1943 and 1947. About 122 million copies of more than 1,300 titles, both fiction and nonfiction were distributed overseas. Among the AASE authors of fiction printed were Twain, Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Fitzgerald. About 155,000 copies of *Gatsby* were distributed, helping to revive Fitzgerald's moribund literary reputation. Then came Arthur Mizener and *The Far Side of Paradise* in 1951.

Mizener's book, a first biography of Fitzgerald, was influential and controversial. He did not personally know the Fitzgerald's but drew on reputation, research and critical analysis for his formulation of personal and professional aspects of their lives. The strength of his book was his discourse on *The Great Gatsby* and the American Dream, which was

seminal and much praised. However, although Mizener went to Princeton for his BA degree, Fitzgerald had left years before, and already had *This Side of Paradise* published (1920). Mizener's discourse on the Fitzgerald's personal lives was heavily criticized. First, by Fitzgerald's close friend, Edmond Wilson, also a literary critic, and then Andrew W. Turnbull, another friend/biographer and Princeton alumnus. In his 1962 biography, *Scott Fitzgerald*, Turnbull balanced the picture of the Fitzgerald's personal lives because he knew them well and furnished a perspective on their character and personality rather than solely on their behavior. Turnbull's book was definitive until Matthew J. Bruccoli published *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, his 1981 biography of Fitzgerald, revised in 2002. This work remains the gold standard. But the popularity of Mizener's book added to the public images of the Fitzgerald's as immoral, profligate alcoholics, however talented they may have been. That skewed reputation has been hard to purge! Read Turnbull/Bruccoli for clear eyed and accurate reporting.

As we approach the 101st anniversary of *Gatsby's* publication, I am thinking of yet another kind of literary resurrection in which I have played a very minor role. I call it "Citations, Notes and Bibliographies": alluding to articles and books which contain source recognition to bolster the author's case. Every college undergraduate paper and Masters/ PhD dissertation is filled with these elements, resurrecting authors and works, often esoteric, to enhance/defend the writer's thesis. Those citations bring individuals/works back to life for a new audience. Of these kinds of citations I have a few. How many, I do not know. What follows is a chronological account of my journey leading to my one published literary article 50 years ago, which was subsequently cited in other publications between 1990 and 2014.

I

In the early Spring of 1975, I had been engaged in an effort to recognize the 50th anniversary of the publication of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (10 April, 1925). While I had read *The Great Gatsby* for an undergraduate English class in 1960, in the 1953 Scribner's Library *SLI*

paperback edition), its presence in my life was muted. Then, in December of 1973, I read about and ordered a copy of Matthew J. Bruccoli's *A Facsimile of the Manuscript of The Great Gatsby*. It ignited my interest in the novel and its author. In the spring of 1975, I contacted Mr. Joseph Covino, then Director of the Great Neck, New York library. Fitzgerald and his family had resided at 6 Gateway Drive in Great Neck for 20 months between October 1922 and May 1924. His work on *Gatsby* began there.

I had already requested the United States Post Office to issue a postage stamp commemorating that event, and was supported by Senators Hubert Humphrey and Fritz Mondale from Minnesota, Fitzgerald's state of birth. In light of those circumstances, Mr. Covino expressed interest in doing something to acknowledge Fitzgerald's time in Great Neck; and so "F. Scott Fitzgerald and Great Neck in the 1920's" was born.

Between 11 June and 20 June 1975, this library offered multiple programs featuring exhibits, films, academic and other speakers. One of the speakers was the late scholar, Matthew J. Bruccoli, who had become *the* authority on all Fitzgerald's work and his life. He told me, after we met on June 11, that Mr. Covino and I had set a "Fitzgerald trap," which could result in some heretofore unknown aspects of Fitzgerald's life and fiction coming to light. And was he right!

One night, I gave a slide presentation put together with the assistance of photographer and friend Raymond Sinacore. The slides pictorialized Fitzgerald's life in Minnesota and Great Neck, including actual places described in *Gatsby*. Later that evening I was approached by two women. One asked if I was Mr. Corso and I said yes. She then pointed to the other woman and said "I'd like to introduce you to the daughter of *The Great Gatsby*." I could feel my left eyebrow sceptically arch but I smiled. In fact, I had been introduced to Mrs. Doris (Kerr) Brown, a local resident who brought some Fitzgerald artifacts with her. These included a first edition of *Gatsby* inscribed to her father: "Dear Bob: Keep reading and you'll finally come to your own adventures which you told

to me one not-forgotten summer night;” and a letter Fitzgerald sent to Kerr in 1924 from France. Wow!

Mrs. Brown grew up in Great Neck, and her family knew the Fitzgerald’s. Robert C. Kerr, Jr., her father, had befriended the author, once telling him a story about Kerr’s youth working on a yacht in Sheepshead Bay. My own research determined that the owner of the yacht was Edward Gilman, employed by a Robert Seaman to run the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company of Brooklyn, New York in 1899. Gilman became General Manager in 1900.

In Fitzgerald’s letter to Kerr, Fitzgerald wrote “The part of what you told me which I am including in my novel is the ship, yatch I mean, & the mysterious yachtsman whose mistress is Nelly Bly.” She was, in fact, Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman, who as Nellie Bly, was a renowned pioneer of investigative reporting. She also traveled around the world alone (at age 26) in 72 days from 14 November 1889 until 25 January 1890, even interviewing Jules Verne in Paris. Elizabeth was also the widow of Robert Seaman who died in 1904. They were married in 1895: she was 31, he was 73!

When her liaison with Gilman began is unclear, but Kerr said he joined Gilman in 1907, four years before Gilman’s death and three years after Seaman’s passing. During this period, Elizabeth was single until 5 April 1895 and her relationship with Gilman may have begun after she met him through her husband in 1900. The relationship ended with Gilman’s demise on 9 February 1911. Elizabeth “Nellie Bly” Seaman died on 11 March 1922, at age 58.

Fitzgerald used Kerr’s disclosure to create the characters Dan Cody and Ella Kaye in Chapter Six of *Gatsby*. He named her Ella Kaye, with Ella short for Elizabeth and K and C pronounced the same way. However, it could also have been a veiled reference to Ella Marie Smith Marble, MD and journalist (1850-1929).

Marble was, among many accomplishments, a journalist/editor for a Washington, D. C. daily newspaper in 1888. She also spent several years in Minneapolis, Minnesota as one of the founders of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Coffee Palace. These venues offered customers non-alcoholic beverages. This movement contributed to the passage of the 18th amendment to the Constitution (Prohibition) in 1919. Marble is one of 1,740 women featured in the publication *A Woman Of The Century*, 1893, highlighting "notable women of importance and their roles in American history." Fitzgerald likely heard of Ella Marble and her accomplishments, either in Minnesota and/or on the East coast.

Nonetheless, this kind of resurrection of the secret lives of two people which was hidden for nearly 70 years troubles me. It reminds me of Dante's journey in the *Inferno* when he meets Francesca di Rimini in the second circle of Hell for lustful sinners. She recounts her adulterous affair leading to her and her lover's death and eternal pain. Dante actually pities them but they had to suffer for eternity! Bly and Gilman can never tell their story. We don't know the whole truth.

What we do know from Brooke Kroeger's excellent biography *Nellie Bly* (1994) is that for some years during their professional/personal relationship, 1890-1911, Gilman embezzled \$100,000 from the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company, including \$25,000 for a yacht. Elizabeth forgave him and cared for him in his illness while he lived, but he never told her why he betrayed her and her late husband as he wept in silent shame. Their liaison may have been adulterous before Seaman's death. We will never know. It's really none of our business!

In late 1975, I purchased, and have been continually listening to until today, an audio book version of *The Great Gatsby* read by the incomparable Alexander Scourby. For 4 ½ hours, Mr. Scourby's rich baritone voice brings the book to life: with your eyes closed in a comfortable chair, feet on a hassock. Ear candy for the brain without calories but loaded with sustenance!

By the way, the post office rejected the idea of a stamp for Gatsby's 50th anniversary. In fact, for his birth centennial on 24 September 1996, it did not issue a first class 32 cent stamp to honor him but a 23 cent stamp instead. A stamp that would not have widespread use. Fitzgerald's reputation as a Jazz Age immoral alcoholic, beginning with *This Side of Paradise*, 1920, survived among conservative and influential Americans 56 years after his death! No resurrection offered. Thankfully, scholars like Bruccoli, the reading public and *Gatsby* film versions, have done it.

II

After this Fitzgerald event, Professor Bruccoli asked me to write a paper about what had transpired at the library for the 1976 edition of the Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual. Following additional research, I wrote *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*. If anyone is interested in reading this paper online, you can go to my website, asiciliam.com and click on "five sections." Then click on View under "Article On F. Scott Fitzgerald" and click on "Article." You will also find View under "Additional Text," which contains a short insert to my novel *A Sicilian-American Comedy* called "The Granddaughter of *The Great Gatsby*."

Next, the Great Neck library hosted another event in October of 1976. This one celebrated the family of author and journalist Ring Lardner. Again, Bruccoli attended and contributed. Lardner's work was published by Charles Scribner's Sons, Fitzgerald's publisher. The Lardners were Great Neck residents from early 1921 until 1922 and Ring was a close friend and drinking partner of Fitzgerald. Lardner read galley proofs of *Gatsby* before publication, correcting several items.

My research in 1975, which is reflected in my paper in The Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual of 1976, notes "Finally, we come to the Owl-Eyed man we meet twice in Gatsby." First, in Chapter III, inside Gatsby's library:

"A stout, middle-aged man with enormous owl-eyed spectacles was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table..." And praising

Gatsby's collection of books: "Absolutely real – have pages and everything." He shows up later as the passenger in the car crash scene after the party and then at Gatsby's funeral.

The reference to "owl eyes" is one clearly associated with Lardner: it was a nickname he picked up while following the White Sox in Chicago as a sportswriter during the early 1900s – the [1919] team that Meyer Wolfshiem fixed. Owl-Eyes returns in Chapter IX. He appears again in the rain at Gatsby's burial:

**"Owl Eyes spoke to me [that's Nick Carraway] at the gate. . . . He took off his glasses and wiped them again outside and in.
"The poor son-of-a-bitch, he said."**

I'm sure Lardner approved the sentiment, which would be reportedly repeated at Fitzgerald's own funeral in 1940 by Dorothy Parker. She said in 1956 "That when [Fitzgerald] died no one went to the funeral, not a single soul came, or even sent a flower." She meant outside of Scottie, his daughter, and other family. Scottie requested that Sheilah Graham, her late father's companion and noted Hollywood gossip columnist, not attend the funeral.

Sadly, "The poor son-of-a-bitch," was Fitzgerald's epitaph, too! He died believing he was a failure. We, 86 years later know he wasn't. How sad.

In addition to professor Bruccoli, another special speaker was Ring Lardner, Jr., an academy award winning screenwriter in the 1940s. He was blacklisted in Hollywood after the House Un-American Committee established he was a member of the Communist Party. Check Wikipedia for more on the very literary Lardner family.

III

Fast Forward to 1979. I am in a musical theater workshop at the New School in Manhattan, N. Y., honing the skills of a lyricist/librettist and looking for a composer to collaborate with me on a musical. There I met Evelyn Durso, a composer, and we started to work on my adaptation of

Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* called *Canaan's Children*. Our work, part time because we both had jobs, continued into 1981.

At that point, Mrs. Marilyn McClean, my neighbor and Director of The New Hyde Park Players, suggested we create an original musical. If we did, she would produce it in 1982. And so, *A Shadow of Her Own* came about. It is a feminist musical based on the careers of Nelly Bly and Ambrose Bierce, two journalists who worked for competing newspaper publishers Pulitzer and Hearst, respectively. I drew on my article, which I mentioned before, for plot elements, including women's struggles to compete with men as their peers, particularly in journalism. Evelyn wrote melodic, memorable music for the show. Sadly, she died in 2009.

IV

Next came my novel, *A Sicilian-American Comedy*, published in 2017. There are many references to Fitzgerald and quotes within the book. In addition, there is a section called "The Granddaughter of The Great Gatsby." In this part of the novel, fiction and non-fiction are intertwined. My protagonist, Jerome Tommaso, leaves his fiancée, Rachel, and their daughter, Sylvia, to travel to South Carolina for *the* celebration of Fitzgerald's 100th birthday on 24 September 1996. It took place at the University of South Carolina campus with Matthew Bruccoli hosting. Again, you may access the text of that section from my website, *asiciliam.com*, as noted earlier.

I drew on my experience with Mrs. Brown from 42 years earlier by transferring that event from mother to her fictional daughter, Polly Stone, after Mrs. Brown's death. The meeting takes place on the University of South Carolina campus over several days. Polly found the novel with its cover intact and her grandfather's letter from Fitzgerald in a box her mother left her. Polly had brought them to show to Bruccoli, then relented much to Jerome's chagrin. She and Jerome burn the materials and spread the ashes around the campus at night. Jerome asks for the book's cover and receives it from Polly, while still lamenting the loss of a literary grail at his fingertips.

We celebrated the publishing centennial of *The Great Gatsby* on 10 April 2025 at the Great Neck library. I donated to the library various books, articles and memorabilia from my personal collection, as well as materials from Fitzgerald's birth centennial in 1996. These items helped establish a permanent Fitzgerald collection in the library's archives. I also gave several lectures on *The Great Gatsby*. These presentations concerned Fitzgerald's use of real person's names and actual places to dramatize characters, and Fitzgerald's use of popular music of the 1920s to comment on character actions.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Use of Names /Places in *The Great Gatsby* to Dramatically Define Characters

Here is a sample of Fitzgerald's use of names to dramatically define characters. The names are Tom Buchanan, Dan Cody and Ella Kaye. We meet Buchanan in Chapter I. Cody and Kaye appear in Chapter VI of the book. Buchanan is married to Daisy, Gatsby's lost love whom he pursues after becoming wealthy as a bootlegger. Fitzgerald describes Tom in Nick Carraway's narrative with my underlining key words:

Her [Daisy] husband, among various accomplishments, had been one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven [read Yale University]— a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anticlimax. His family were enormously wealthy – even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach – but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that rather took your breath away; for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forest. It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that.

Lake Forest, IL was a community founded in 1857 whose first mayor was Sylvester Lind, an immigrant from Scotland who was a dedicated

Presbyterian and Abolitionist. He owned a lumber company and used his business to sail escaped slaves to Canada before the Civil War, in violation of the Fugitive Slave Act. His activity with the Underground Railway system is legendary. Lake Forest became an integrated community early on but evolved into a secluded community inhabited by captains of industry and upper-class elites, seeking refuge from Chicago, a city overrun with immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. These refugees, they believed, had dangerous socialistic ideas and indulged in excessive alcoholic consumption. The Onwentia Club was the premiere social and sporting club in the Midwest. No doubt the Buchanan family were charter members. Today, of the 19,367 inhabitants (2020 census) of Lake Forest about 90% are white, while one percent are black.

Dan Cody and Ella Kaye are described in the following way:

Cody was fifty years old then, a product of the Nevada silver fields, of the Yukon, of every rush for mettle since seventy-five. The transactions in Montana copper that made him many times a millionaire found him physically robust but on the verge of soft-mindedness, and, suspecting this, an infinite number of women tried to separate him from his money. The none too savory ramifications by which Ella Kaye, the newspaper woman, played Madame de Maintenon to his weakness and sent him to sea in a yacht, were common property of the turgid journalism of 1902. He had been coasting along all hospitable shores for five years when he turned up as James Gatz's destiny in Little Girl Bay.

Madame de Maintenon was the historical mistress of France's King Louis XIV. She was known for her influence and perceived ambition, to portray how Ella Kaye manipulates Dan Cody, Gatsby's benefactor, and effectively steals Gatsby's inheritance.

Cody's yacht was named the *Tuolomee*, as in "follow me." For the geographically curious, there is a spot on the Michigan end of Lake Superior called Little Girl's Point but it has no bay. There is no way any

yacht could anchor in this place. There is no marina at Little Girl's Point. It is just a river mouth into Lake Superior with no anchoring facilities. This was not a place where the *Tuolomee* could anchor.

However, Fitzgerald learned something from a Great Neck friend, in 1923, who as a youth had served Gatsby-like on a yacht in Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn starting in 1907. Robert C. Kerr, Jr. told a tale to Fitzgerald "One Not-Forgotten Summer Night," as the author's inscription reads in the newly published *The Great Gatsby* in 1925 Fitzgerald gifted to Kerr. What Fitzgerald learned was that "a mysterious yachtsman" captained the ship on which he had an affair with journalist Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman, renowned by her pseudonym, Nelly Bly. The captain was Edward Robinson Gilman, general manager of the Iron Clad Manufacturing Company in Brooklyn, New York. The business was owned by Robert Seaman, the elderly husband of Nelly Bly. Kerr joined Gilman in 1907, four years before Gilman's death and three years after Seaman's passing. The relationship with Bly ended with Gilman's demise on February 9, 1911. Elizabeth died on March 11, 1922.

Fitzgerald used this disclosure to create the characters Dan Cody and Ella Kaye in Chapter Six of *Gatsby*. With both Gilman and Cochrane deceased, Fitzgerald ran no risk in exposing their relationship. Instead, he named her Ella Kaye, with Ella short for Elizabeth and K and the C in Cochrane pronounced the same way. However, it could have been a veiled reference to Ella Marie Smith Marble, MD and journalist (1850-1929).

Marble was, among many accomplishments, a journalist/editor for a Washington, D. C. daily newspaper in 1888. She also spent several years in Minneapolis, Minnesota as one of the founders of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Coffee Palace. These venues offered customers non-alcoholic beverages. This movement contributed to the passage of the 18th amendment to the Constitution (Prohibition) in 1919. Marble is one of 1,740 women featured in the publication *A Woman Of The Century*, 1893, highlighting "notable women of importance and

their roles in American history.” Fitzgerald likely heard of Ella Marble and her accomplishments, either in Minnesota and/or on the East coast.

The name Dan Cody also evokes Colonel William F. Cody, the famous “Buffalo Bill” of the American West. That Fitzgerald intended such an association with his Dan Cody, the “pioneer debauchee, who during one phase of American life brought back to the Eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon,” is apparent.

It is also a fact that William Randolph Hearst’s father, George Hearst, was another Cody type. George (1820-1891) was active in silver and gold mining, which produced many millions of dollars in profit from ventures in Nevada, Utah, Montana and South Dakota between 1860 and 1890. Hearst’s mother, Phoebe Elizabeth Apperson Hearst (1842-1919), was an ardent philanthropist who supported many women’s causes. She held control over the Hearst wealth after George’s death. However, she gave her son a stipend of \$10,000 a month (!) for the rest of her life (28 years). That’s \$3,360,000, most of which (1891 to 1912) was before Federal income taxing became law in 1913. After her death in 1919, William got it all. That stipend to William is worth about \$58 million in 2025, when adjusted for inflation. But in his early days, William could buy an awful lot of European antiques, including entire castles and their contents: hence Hearst Castle in San Simeon, CA., or the Xanadu of Charles Foster Kane in Orson Welles’ master film, *Citizen Kane*, 1941. Pardon the digression.

Getting back to Dan Cody, I was surprised to learn that there once was a real Dan Cody. There are two references to this Dan Cody in print. The first, somewhat veiled, is in Fitzgerald’s *Ledger*, appearing on page 177 under 1923 which reads: March-Sold This Side of Paradise and South to Montgomery. Dapper Dan....” The second reference appears in Sara Mayfield’s book, *Exiles From Paradise*, 1971, in which we learn that Dan Cody was one of Montgomery’s most eligible and well-to-do bachelors in 1919 and also one of Zelda Sayre’s favorite beaux. In fact, Dan Cody, a strikingly handsome young man, had been one of several beaux pressing Zelda for her hand in 1919 when she had temporarily broken her

engagement with Fitzgerald. The visits in 1923 was presumably cordial; but in retrospect, Fitzgerald may have linked Dan Cody of Montgomery, Alabama to the “pioneer debauchee” in Gatsby ... because psychologically, the wealth of Dan Cody of Montgomery represented someone rich who almost stole Zelda from Fitzgerald just as surely as Tom Buchanan of Chicago was to steal Daisy Fay of Louisville from Jay Gatsby. That’s one link between Tom Buchanan and Dan Cody. Here’s the other.

In northern California, near Yosemite National Park, there’s Tuolumne County, one of the original 27 counties of CA. Off the Tuolumne River lies the site of a gold mine which yielded over \$2 million worth of ore carrying \$15 per ton in free gold. It was the Buchanan mine, actively worked from the early 1850’s. In the same general area is Tuttletown, also a mining community. Just west of Tuttletown is a place called Jackass Hill, named for the braying of the jackasses in the pack trains that paused overnight on their way to and from the mines. Mark Twain spent five months on Jackass Hill in 1864-1865. A replica of his cabin stands on the hilltop about one mile from Tuttletown. You will encounter Twain’s experience in his semi-autobiographical travel memoir, *Roughing It*.

On May 22, 1922, the replica of Twain’s cabin was dedicated as a Landmark Pilgrimage site, making it a national event. Now you know who read about this event in the New York Times, as he relaxed over breakfast in his rented Great Neck, NY home. And dollars to doughnuts, Fitzgerald then discovered the Buchanan mine that was in Tuolumne County.

And so the names of Tom Buchanan and Dan Cody had a lot in common for Fitzgerald. It was all about wealth, the wealth from the rough American “Gold Rush” days to the inherited long-term wealth of Tom Buchanan, the man who used it to steal Daisy from Gatsby. Gatsby’s illegally obtained wealth made him a *nouveau riche* person, using it for ostentatious parties lacking in good taste, as Tom Buchanan attests to several times in *The Great Gatsby*. As we know from many of Fitzgerald’s

writings, conservative and inherited long-term wealthy American families, frown on rich girls marrying poor boys. Fitzgerald won the hand of Zelda Sayre only after his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, was published on March 26, 1920. It was a sensation and made Fitzgerald an overnight celebrity. Now, he could retrieve Zelda. They married on April 3, 1920 at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Fitzgerald as Gatsby got his girl but it was pretty much downhill thereafter. Zelda was committed to an institution for serious psychological problems and Fitzgerald went to Hollywood to earn enough money to support Zelda and educate their daughter Scotty.

When Fitzgerald died in December 1940 at the age of 44, his estate was worth only \$35,000 to \$60,000, mostly from a life insurance policy. He died believing he was a failure: his self-serving epitaph, like Gatsby's, was "The poor son-of-a-bitch." Zelda died in a fire at Highland Hospital in Ashland, North Carolina on March 10, 1948. After their death, their daughter Scotty, a journalist, lived until June 18, 1986. A lifelong Democrat, she discovered to her shame that her maternal Grandfather, Anthony D. Sayre, was an Alabama state legislator who sponsored a bill in 1893 that would deprive black people of the right to vote in the state.

So we come full circle from the Underground Railway of Sylvester Lind to the Buchanan's white wealth in 1920s Lake Forest. Buchanan was a white supremacist, as Fitzgerald notes in Chapter I. Check that out for yourselves.

Twice married Scottie Fitzgerald Lanahan Smith's trust has given her three children many millions of dollars, largely from sales of *The Great Gatsby* worldwide in book form, translated into many languages. Couple that with film adaptation royalties and you have a bonanza of bucks. *Gatsby* is now considered one of the greatest American novels ever written and is known by its iconic name to millions, whether they have read it or not. It is, despite its concise 47,094 words and 109 pages, a most profound and enduring piece of literature about the American Dream and its corrosion and unrealized romantic fantasies.

Coincidentally, April 10th was the 66th anniversary of my first date with my wife Barbara. We lived in Brooklyn at the time, and took the subway that night to Manhattan to see the film *Gigi*. It was sold out, so we ventured nearby to catch *Separate Tables*. Later, we dined at Toffinetti's in Times Square. We are married more than 63 years. She is the one indispensable person in my life.

VI

Two other resurrections took place in 2024 and 2025. I was able to publish my revised version of the libretto for *A Shadow of Her Own* in 2024. I dedicated the libretto to Evelyn and her family. Mrs. Marilyn McClean, the 92 year old Director of The New Hyde Park Players, led a recreation of *A Shadow of Her Own*. In two separate, single performances of the musical with a local cast, *Shadow* was performed at the CM Performing Arts Center in Oakdale, New York on 13 July 2025 and at the Great Neck Library on 19 August 2025. Generally, musical revivals are rare. I thank Marilyn and the cast for making it possible and memorable. Evelyn would have loved it. I had the library performance professionally video taped for posterity.

VII

In 1990 and thereafter, my article, *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*, was cited in 9 publications. What follows is a list of those books and their authors, editors, commentators, etc. My resurrections!

1. *Sixteen Modern American Authors, Volume 2: A Survey Of Research And Criticism Since 1972*. Edited by Jackson R. Bryer. Duke University Press, 1990. Section on F. Scott Fitzgerald by Jackson R. Bryer, pages 301- 359. Citation on page 333 and INDEX, page 769. Corso, Joseph, *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual 1976.

2. *The Great Gatsby: The Limits of Wonder*, Richard Lehan, Twayne's Masterwork Studies No. 36, Robert Lecker, General Editor, Twayne Publishers, 1990. Articles and Notes, page 141, cites *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby* by Joseph Corso, regarding Bob Kerr's story. This citation is the same in all the following publications except the last.
3. *The Great Gatsby, The Authorized Text: Preface and notes* by Matthew J. Bruccoli, Collier Books, 1991-1992. Explanatory Notes 104.10, page 212. Corso, Joseph, *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual 1976.
- 4, *Nellie Bly*, Brooke Kroeger, Time Books, Random House, 1994, pages 316 – 317; Notes section, page 576. Corso, Joseph, *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual 1976.
5. *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 219: F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby: A Documentary Volume*. Edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli, 2000; page 20, Note 3; "Joseph Corso did most of the searching." Page 22 of text: Gatsby and Robert Kerr, page 24; page 319: Book Selections and Articles, Corso, Joseph, *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual 1976.
6. *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Matthew J. Bruccoli, University of South Carolina Press (1981, 2002). Bruccoli acknowledges *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby* by Joseph Corso as his source for Bob Kerr's story, page 184 and Note 131 on page 590.
7. *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem, and The Invention of The Great Gatsby*, Sarah Churchwell, The Penguin Press, 2014. CHAPTER SIX, Bob Kerr's Story: America As A Pioneer., pages 194-198. NOTES page 365; BIBLIOGRAPHY page 376; INDEX page 389, Bly, Nellie and page 390, Cody, Dan.

8. *So We Beat On: How The Great Gatsby Came To Be And Why It Endures*, Maureen Corrigan, Little, Brown and Company, 2014. Chapter 2: “In the Land of Ambition and Success,” pages 93-94, footnote 31. Notes page 316, note 31 and page 317, note 63 from page 113. Index, page 335: Bly, Nellie, 93-94; page 336: Cody, Dan(character) 36, 42, 48, 63, 94, 133-134, 152, 317n.63 and page 340: Kaye, Ella (character), 94, 134, 146. [“Bob Kerr’s Story” concerning Nellie Bly is cited in note 63 as sourced from “Bruccoli, *Some Sort of Epic Grandeur*, 184.”(1981, 2002) In that biography, Bruccoli acknowledges *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby* by Joseph Corso as his source for Kerr’s story, etc.: Note 131 on page 590.]

9. *F. Scott Fitzgerald at Work: the Making of The Great Gatsby*, Horst H. Kruse, University of Alabama Press, 2014. Chapter 1, Max von Gerlach, the Man Behind Jay Gatsby, pages 69-70: Bob Kerr’s story; Bibliography, page 137: Corso, Joseph, *One Not-Forgotten Summer Night: Sources For Fictional Symbols Of American Character In The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual 1976.

There may be other citations but locating them, even with AI, is not easy.

Which brings me to my final task: my own citation of articles I want to acknowledge for their extraordinary explication of Fitzgerald’s last pages of *Gatsby*. These pieces also appeared in the Fitzgerald Hemingway Annual of 1976: *The Great Gatsby: Apogee of Fitzgerald’s Mythopoeia* by Neila Seshachari, Weber State College, pages 96-108; and *The Great Gatsby: The Final Vision* by Christiane Johnson, University of Paris VII, pages 109-115.

Here are excerpts from each. First, Neila Seshachari:

The final pages of *The Great Gatsby* impart to the reader a philosophical sense of tragedy of a mythic ideal – the American Dream – rather than a sense of Gatsby’s personal tragedy. It is a tragedy of society, of its shallowness, of its false values, and of its

blindness. Gatsby, even in death, is untainted. As a matter of fact, Gatsby's stature may be said to rise in his death. Nick Carraway, who is like the antenna of a moral order of the universe, is awed by Gatsby's stature in death, and in Nick's mind and values, there is a reaffirmation of Gatsby's real worth. This is the apotheosis and resurrection of the mythic hero. Through his resurrection, the mythic hero enlarges the vision of the common man, "For the hero figure is," as Emma Jung points out, "one of the eternal archetypal images which slumber in the depths of every soul and which determine human life and destiny in unsuspected measure." [*The Grail Legend*, Jung and Marie-Louis Van Franz, page 46] In this sense, Gatsby, the mythic hero, operates not only at the macrocosmic level but through the linking of the imagination of the common man, at even the microcosmic level.

Jay Gatsby is a mythic figure because he operates simultaneously at the macrocosmic and microcosmic levels, without being personally affected by his role. For instance, *The Great Gatsby* is a critique of the American Dream and a criticism of its material values, but this criticism never touches Gatsby's own personality. He is untouched by the implications of the novel. In a corrupt, materialistic world, Gatsby's pursuit remains idealistic and untainted; amongst a class of shallow liars, he turned out to be the one with unswerving values; Gatsby's own wealth and display of it remains totally dedicated to the service of his romantic ideal. And therefore, when the summer interlude ends on the bizarre picture of Gatsby's dead body floating in his swimming pool, even the tragedy does not seem to touch Gatsby's person. It is a tragic commentary on every other character in the novel (except Nick's) and on the American Dream itself, but not on Gatsby. Gatsby curiously appears to vindicate his position. The clue to this final impression that the novel leaves may lie in the fact that "whenever the mythological mood pervades, tragedy is impossible.." [*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell, page 69] The death of a mythic hero is a tragedy only for the people; it is always a triumph or ultimate victory for the hero himself. For the hero, who in his life presented a dual

perspective (as Gatsby did), in his death is a synthesizing image. So in Gatsby's death are recociled all the conflicts and and tensions of national and human vision , as well as Gatsby's own tensions.

Weber State College

Second, Chrisiane Johnson:

Fitzgerald's *The Greatb Gatsby* is a vision. In this passage, the novel is given a dimension that has been latent all along. Here from the temporal and the inessential, we pass pass on to the timeless and the essential, in a typically Fitzgeraldian manner: nothing is fixed, everything is fluid, moving, changing. And imperceptibly we are carried from the palaces of Long Island Into the eternal flow of time.

In his original manuscript, Fitzgerald had put the first long paragraph of the last page at the end of the first chapter of his novel: it accompanied the gesture that Gatsby made toward Daisy's dock lit by its green light. But the novelist soon realized that, at that place and moment of the narrative, the evocation of the past, of the primitive island, betrayed both too much and too little: it lost its power of evocation and became forgotten in the course of the novel. On the contrary, as a conclusion, it gives the novel a mythical dimension, often pointed out by critics, which is so characteristic of American literature: Gatsby is much more than a Midwesterner come East; the story of his dream together with his "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" are those of America itself, and his tremendous and misled hope becomes that of mankind. Fitzgerald prepared us for that dimension all through the novel, particularly in the passages of an elegiac nature in which Nick, the narrator, meditated on Gatsby, and which, because of their very tone, were meant to receive our spontaneous and irrational response. This page is the outcome of those passages....

The vision begins with a return to the origin of the American nation, to a primitive past, imagined as pastoral and idyllic, for

which Americans have nostalgically been yearning since the remote beginning. Long Island becomes “the old island ... that flowered,” and it is called “a fresh, green breast,” and these few words are sufficient to suggest the essence of that pastoral past; but the maternal image, “breast,” betrays an even deeper longing in man, the desire to be united again to nature as mother (the buried cause of America’s attraction to its pastoral past)....

Through a very Fitzgeraldian dialectics, the very mention of Gatsby, the man, suggests the deceiving, adulterated quality of his dream and of the broader dream as well; just as the verb, “pandered,” in the context of “fresh, green breast of the new world,” is bound to evoke the Fall from the Garden of Eden. But all this is illusive to the extreme, a minimum of words carrying a maximum of meaning....

If Gatsby’s dream is “already behind him,” it is because it is connected with past hope, the past hope of a whole nation, as is, once more, suggested by “the dark fields of the republic.” The word “republic,” with its implications of aspirations and ideals, prolongs the fresco which started with the Dutch sailors and the discovery of the continent, and contributes further to place the novel in a historical context much wider than the 1920s. Those fields which “rolled on” are the Middle West and the West, the Frontier, still unknown to the first settlers, but which was to feed the dream here first revealed to them and which would continue to exist long after them. “Fields” and “republic” also evoke Jefferson’s democratic ideal and dream of keeping the country rural. Furthermore, the word “fields” recalls battlefields of the Civil War and of the American Revolution, fields on which the *Republic* fought for its very survival....

Gatsby is us, Gatsby is every man. And the green light is much more than the light “at the end of daisy’s dock;” it is now called “the orgasmic future.” We know Fitzgerald meant “orgasmic,” which, he said “is the adjective for ‘orgasm’ and it expresses exactly the intended ecstasy. It is not a bit dirty.” The fact that the one term is

most likely to suggest the other underlines the ambivalence of Gatsby's dream which partakes both of the kind of ecstasy Fitzgerald had in mind and of the orgies into which Gatsby's parties degenerated. And what is implied here is that no dream is exempt from this ambivalence....

Let us notice the choice of physical gestures in the whole passage: trying to grasp, running forward, stretching out arms; they are all gestures of a quest, an unceasing quest toward a goal that is never reached. The human condition is to aspire, and the quest counts more than the goal which remains unattainable. With Gatsby, the reason is clear: the future to which he is aspiring is a false future, it is a future that attempts to repeat the past, it is both before and behind. [After all, the past is tomorrow's yesterdays]

But the movement of the third and fourth paragraphs, by carrying us toward the last sentence and the final image, seems to suggest that all men are likewise endlessly aspiring toward the past. The movement of that ending is swifter, the sentences are shorter, more syncopated, as if to render those constant and vain attempts at reaching a receding goal. The numerous nouns and adjectives of the beginning, which contributed to evoke the vision, are now being replaced by a great number of verbs, in order to express movement. And the reader is led irresistibly to the final image of the current, the flow of life on which men are only frail boats. The alliterate b's give that last sentence a decisive and final quality. All limitations, in time as well as in space, have disappeared. Just as Gatsby's hope was both before and behind him, we don't know whether the current is carrying us forward or backward. Man is at the same time acting and acted upon: "we beat on," but we are "borne back." And the last word is "past." Man is endlessly aspiring toward the past, toward a lost paradise. His continued quest for the future can only lead him into the past. But there is grandeur in his constant quest in spite of his helplessness.

In this whole passage, Fitzgerald carries his reader, not through any logical reasoning, since he is in a field where logic simply does

not apply, but through the power of words and the primordial and mythical images they suggest. He succeeds, in an extremely poetical page, where serenity prevails, in evoking the whole human condition. And this seems to us its greatest value: the breadth of its vision lending it an archetypal quality. *Universite' de Paris VII*

Joseph J. Corso, Jr., 22 February 2026: Happy 294th birthday George!