

The Great Gatsby and Revolution, in Theme and Style

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When Jay Gatsby "takes" Daisy Fay in October 1917 (Fitzgerald, *Gatsby* 59, 116), the date is not incidental; it corresponds to the Russian Revolution, an event that Fitzgerald was inclined to favor even if he later became disenchanted (Fitzgerald, *Crack-Up* 178, 290). Speaking of himself in the early 1920s, Fitzgerald had said, "I am essentially Marxian" (*Crack-Up*, 178). If we take him at his word—and I can see why some would not, given Fitzgerald's infatuation with the rich—then we may wish to read *The Great Gatsby* as a critique of *laissez-faire* capitalism and the harmful effects of money on morals. The note sounded in the reference to October 1917 is not a call to arms for a Marxist revolution but a hint that America is a country in need of radical social change. That theme is orchestrated in the novel primarily through three strategies: the history of people and events; the structural grouping of characters that expose the corruption of American society; and the subversive irony and satiric word play.

In the America of the 1920s, the worst manifestations of the Gilded Age reappeared, compounded by the excesses and lawbreaking of Prohibition. Fitzgerald arrestingly depicts the dissolution of Victorian moral values and the frenzy for money and upward mobility. As those with a foot up on the financial ladder ferociously sought to keep the hot struggles of the poor from contaminating them, some members of the working classes, excluded from top-drawer corporations and colleges, from mainline country clubs, churches, and fraternal organizations, began to look to socialism. Others simply reinvented their pasts. Light-skinned Afro-Americans "passed"; immigrants with surnames like Goldenberger (or Gatz) took new ones that sounded "American"; and poor provincials moved to Chicago or New York.

Gatsby's makeover is a case in point. The rumors that Gatsby is a killer are figuratively true. "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once" (36); "You look at him sometime when he thinks nobody's looking at him. I'll bet he killed a man" (37). In the Plaza Hotel, when Tom reveals that he has heard from Walter Chase that some big caper is afoot, this disclosure leaves Gatsby looking "as if he had 'killed a man'" (105). That man, I submit, is Gatsby. Let us remember that as a teenager Gatsby killed James Gatz, his old self. The Gatz family were tenant farmers, landless and poor. (Gatsby later buys his father a house.) Like the thousands of young people in the 1920s deserting the land, Gatsby, a North Dakota country boy, leaves home to improve his lot.

Ironically, in an America that tirelessly promoted the Horatio Alger myth—start at the bottom, work hard, rise, meet your employer's daughter, marry her, and succeed to the helm of the business—Gatsby returns from the war and finally meets the right person, the man who can make him rich. (More important than the Alger myth is the truism that what matters is not what you know but who you know.) Wolfsheim introduces Gatsby to a get-rich-quick scheme, namely criminal capitalism and gangster economics. The classless and even-handed society advertised in handbills inducing immigrants to come to America proves to be a lie. A person ultimately needs "gonnegtions."

Gatsby's story, then, is an anti-Horatio Alger story, one that rejects both the Horatio Alger myth and its inversion as a cautionary tale. The novel ends up not blaming Gatsby for his attempt to rise by the "wrong means," but blaming the class structure that made that rise seem so desirable and created those criminal means.

Initially, Gatsby pursues the American dream. He "[beats] his way along the south shore of Lake Superior" and spends a fortnight at St. Olaf's College trying to pay his way through college as a janitor; but despising the work, he returns to Lake Superior, where he meets Dan Cody, who finds him "extravagantly ambitious" (78). Willing to work for Cody as "steward, mate, skipper, secretary and even jailor" (78), Gatsby serves the rich yachtsman hoping for an opportunity to rise in the world. His reward, however, comes not, as promised, in the form of money—Ella Kaye inherits his twenty-five thousand dollars—but in "the substantiality of a man" (79), a boon that serves him well in the Great War, where he acquits himself admirably, and earns a short stay at Oxford.

The war years and the medal that he wins from Montenegro are not simply what Fitzgerald calls "the retrospect of Gatsby's past" (Crack-Up 270); this historical background information again associates Gatsby with revolution, though in this case not socialist but nationalist. The Great War issued in no small degree from an assassination (the Archduke) and Serbian demands for independence. Montenegro had been a client state of Austria-Hungary from 1916 to 1918. In fact, Vienna's only military success in World War I, without help from Germany, was its occupation of Montenegro. The Austrian occupation came to an end in the autumn of 1918, when Montenegro was liberated by its own native sons and Allied forces, one of whom, for a while at least, was presumably Gatsby, demobilized in June 1918. On November 26, 1918, a national assembly convened at Podgorica declared the Montenegrin dynasty deposed, and voted union with Serbia. Given the November 1918 date, we must assume that the medal Gatsby won from Montenegro was for his heroic participation with the Allied expeditionary forces that helped that country stage a successful revolt against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, freeing Montenegro to become part of a new pan-Slavic movement that eventuated in a union of Slavic peoples in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

To express this period of radical extremes, economic disparities, class snobbery, and moral carelessness, Fitzgerald patterns and groups his characters and their social differences so as to show the corruption "Under the Red, White, and Blue," a title that the author was "crazy about" and that at the last minute he hoped to substitute for The Great Gatsby (Brucoli in Gatsby 180). We need only consider the following groupings to see in the novel a bitter class struggle. Tom Buchanan, Daisy Fay, and Jordan Baker constitute the old-moneyed idle rich. As befits old money, we are not privy to the sources of their wealth, except perhaps for Jordan, who has a well-off aunt and seems to live parasitically off of any man who will keep her. Tom is so rich that he hires a train to transport his friends from Chicago to Louisville for his wedding. And Daisy and Jordan are iconically seen twice in white dresses aimlessly sitting on a couch. At one point, in fact, Nick thinks of them as floating, a telling word given the heavy enervating heat of the moment.

Gatsby represents new money; he is a parvenu, an upstart vulgarian with loud tastes in parties, clothing, and cars. Although his money comes from bootlegging, the source of his wealth is immaterial. His feminine equivalent is the poor and lower-class Myrtle Wilson, who has in common with Gatsby the urgent need to ascend the social ladder. Both were born into poverty and have questionable relatives: Gatsby's father eats like a hog and uses bad grammar; Myrtle's language marks her as unschooled, and her sister is a prostitute. Both are willing to use immoral means to improve their stations in life, Gatsby through the illicit sale of alcohol, Myrtle through sex. Both have execrable tastes; Myrtle's are seen in her clothes, perfume, apartment furnishings, mongrel dogs, and reading material. Both are poseurs, Gatsby living in a faux Normandy Hôtel de Ville, importing from England silk shirts, stocking his library with handsomely bound books in which the pages are uncut, and affecting the phrase "old sport." Both die prematurely owing, in one way or another, to George Wilson, Gatsby directly by being mistaken for Myrtle's killer and shot, and Myrtle indirectly by wishing to escape George Wilson and the garage for a better life. And both pay the ultimate price for social climbing in an America that may not be listening to Emerson's "courtly muses of Europe" (69), but is nonetheless imitating European class divisions based on old and new money.

Like Myrtle, the McKays are trying to improve their social position; but they lack her relentless energy and sweat. Mr. McKay, for example, sheepishly tells Tom, "I'd like to do more work on Long Island if I could get the entry" (28), a request that Tom mocks. Mrs. McKay married Chester because she thought he was above the "little kyke who'd been after me for years" (29). But just as Gatsby's gangster connections cause him to fail with Daisy, the McKays would be hopelessly out of their depth in society.

As with Gatsby and the McKays, just beneath the surface of each of the characters is another person, usually one made worse by the worship or acquisition of wealth. Tom breaks Myrtle's nose, an example of the ruffian below the fancy clothes. Myrtle sounds like a harridan when she denounces her absent husband and misrepresents her relationship with Tom. The emotionally divided Nick, thrown together in Myrtle's apartment with the hoi polloi and a thug, associates himself with "the casual watcher in the darkening streets," and "I was him too, looking up and wondering. I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life" (30). By the end of the chapter (two), we see the many failings of the characters. As Shaw argued in Major Barbara, poverty is "the worst of crimes" for what it does to the character of the poor. Fitzgerald, a great admirer of Shaw, makes a similar statement about class in the way he groups houses and other domiciles.

We need only compare Myrtle's cluttered and stuffy apartment with the airiness and spaciousness of the Buchanan house and Gatsby's mansion. Even the sweltering Plaza Hotel room (chapter seven) contrasts favorably with Myrtle's airless flat.

Following Shaw's lead, Fitzgerald shows us that American capitalism's worst crime is what it does to the American character.

In the design of the novel, the one constant pattern is the immorality of all the characters, whether owing to lack of money or to the sexual predations the rich regard as their right. Consider: Gatsby and Wolfsheimer are bootleggers; George Wilson an assassin. Tom left Chicago because of a scandal involving a woman and in the east continues his whoremongering. Daisy engaged in premarital sex with Gatsby and is a hit-and-run driver. Jordan cheats and lies. Hardly a person is without an illicit lover: Gatsby, Daisy, Tom, Nick, Jordan, Myrtle, and Catherine.

In Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Karl Marx argues that a man will "sell himself" (70) to have what another has. But it never dawns on him that the more he obtains, the less he keeps of himself. This equation virtually defines Gatsby's quest; but it also holds throughout his world. Hardly a person escapes whoring: Gatsby and Ella Kaye to Dan Cody, Daisy to Tom (the necklace), Tom to Daisy (the Plaza Hotel), Gatsby to Daisy (the house and the shirts), Catherine to her clients, Myrtle to Tom, Nick to his three different girlfriends (the one at home, the one at the office, and Jordan), Nick to Gatsby (Nick moves from "unaffected scorn" [6] to fondness and finally imagines himself as Gatsby [86]), Jordan to whichever rich man will pay the bills, George Wilson to Tom (for the sale of a car), and the McKays to any person above their station.

When Tom laments the decline in morals, he is right, even though he is a principal contributor to the breakdown. Gangsterism abounds. Love is bought. Mendacity thrives. Fidelity is unfashionable, and discreetness passé. The exploitation and abuse of women go unnoticed. Carelessness substitutes for moral responsibility, and parental neglect of a child—Pammy—passes for normal. (It takes Daisy an unconscionably long time before she utters her child's name.) Wheels come off of cars as the country careers toward a ditch, and Gatsby's guests lack the courtesy of paying their respects to their dead benefactor.

Fitzgerald's portrayal of a country in the throes of radical social change even extends to his introduction of whimsical wordplay¹ and satiric puns, which are inherently subversive. The paragraph that begins "One October day in nineteen-seventeen," and continues with Jordan walking on the lawns of the neighborhood houses and her skirt blowing a little in the wind, concludes with "the red, white, and blue banners in front of all the houses stretched out stiff and said tut-tut-tut-tut in a disapproving way" (59). Clearly the patriotism of the rich objects to trespassing and sexual impropriety, both associated with the winds of social change and, through the date, with the Russian Revolution. And the house with the largest lawn and flag is Daisy Fay's. It is she who, at age eighteen, behaves in a revolutionary manner, taking up with Gatsby, a man much beneath her social class. In this example and in succeeding ones, Nick's wordplay hints at the divine comedy—and tragedy—of 1920s American class snobbery.

Fitzgerald's subversive wordplay runs throughout the novel, and some of it comes out in character names: Carraway, Nick's last name, puns on "carried away," which is exactly what happens to Nick as he progressively grows into Gatsby, assuming his state of mind and finally speaking for him (86-87). Gatsby's name, as a number of critics have suggested, is a play on the gangster word for gun, "gat." Tom Buchanan is indeed a "Buck" or a "Bull," given his anarchic sexual propensities. Daisy's maiden name, Fay, can mean faith or fate or fairy, in the old, fearful sense as in "Morgan Le Fay." She bewitches Gatsby with her money and manners. Gatsby puts his faith in her, and she determines his destiny. Whether or not George Wilson stands for Woodrow Wilson, as some scholars contend, he is certainly ineffectual, except at destruction: murder and suicide. Finally, in the Sloane episode (79-81), when Gatsby is snubbed by Sloane and Tom and "a pretty woman in a brown riding habit," Fitzgerald punningly unites the name of the man and the import of the three riding off cavalierly, as it were, before Gatsby can join them. The word "Sloane" (OED) is a noun that means "a severe snub or reproof."

At the start of chapter two, Fitzgerald, invoking T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," with all its moral implications, says that "under Doctor Eckleburg's persistent stare . . . the only building in sight" was the Wilson garage "sitting on the edge of the waste land" (my emphases; 22).

In this godless land, Doctor Eckleburg, whom George Wilson associates with an omniscient deity, is ironically touting eyeglasses. As Tom and Myrtle make their way to the apartment, she orders the cab driver to stop so that she can buy a dog from a street peddler. The animal is indeed a dog, in the pejorative sense of that word; it is "not exactly a police dog" (24; [Fitzgerald's emphasis]) but more likely a lice-ridden mongrel.

Later in the same chapter, at Myrtle's westside apartment, the wordplay highlights her ignorance. Assuming airs while talking to Catherine, her sister, Myrtle says, "I had a woman up here last week to look at my feet and when she gave me the bill you'd of thought she had my appendicitus out."

In the third chapter, the first of Gatsby's parties shows us that the fatuity of such social pretension extends to the rich as well. "Anyhow he gives large parties,' said Jordan, changing the subject with urban distaste for the concrete" (my emphases; 41).² Is her snobbish distaste for the particular or for cement or for both? Two paragraphs later, the orchestra leader announces, "Ladies and gentlemen . . . at the request of Mr. Gatsby we are going to play for you Mr. Vladimir Tostoff's latest work which attracted so much attention at Carnegie Hall last May" (41). The orchestra leader then declares that the work was "a big sensation," only to undercut his own words with the comment, "Some sensation!" Unlike his patron, the musician knows a "tossed off" piece when he hears one.

Jordan's moral carelessness and Nick's emotional paralysis are also subjected to puns. "Her grey sun-strained eyes stared straight ahead but she had deliberately shifted our relations, and for a moment I thought I loved her. But I am slow thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires" (my emphases; 48). In the diction of automobiles, Fitzgerald tells us that Jordan is gearing up, while Nick, ever cautious, is trying to keep from committing. The chapter ends ironically with Nick swearing that he is "one of the few honest people that [he has] ever known"; and yet just a few lines before this statement, he admits to writing a girl back home, one whom he wishes to break up with, and concluding his letters "Love, Nick" (48). As Jordan careers carelessly down the highway and from one boyfriend to another, Nick refuses to acknowledge his own moral failings. We have truly fallen, if not among liars, then certainly self-deceivers.

The epic catalogue of names that virtually begins chapter four is a series of satiric puns³ that belie Nick's contention that "their last names were either the melodious names of flowers and months or the sterner ones of the great American capitalists" (50). In fact, most of the names fall outside of those categories, and some are just downright unsavory, for example, Leeches, Belcher, and Smirkes. If these names represent "the melodious names of flowers and months" or the great American capitalists, Fitzgerald is being either sardonic or disingenuous. In either case, the joke is intended to puncture the pretensions of the social butterflies, common or rare, who flocked to Gatsby's blue lawns.

The same chapter includes a pun that refers to the difference between old and new money, a distinction that will prove fatal to Gatsby's dreams. Nick describes the drive into New York City: "Over the great bridge, with the sunlight through the girders making a constant flicker upon the moving cars, with the city rising up across the river in white heaps and sugar lumps all built with a wish out of non-olfactory money" (my emphasis; 54-55). Nick distinguishes between money that smells and money that does not. Gatsby, of course, is earning the former kind. The pun also plays on the words "old factory," which is likewise the wrong kind of money, because it invokes sweatshops and immigrant entrepreneurs, namely, the nouveau riche. On the next page of the novel, one of those entrepreneurs, Wolfshiem, is talking about handing money to Katspaugh (cat's-paw: a person used by another to do dangerous, distasteful, or unlawful work; a dupe; a tool). In a society where the rich or the criminal wish to keep their hands clean, a cat's-paw becomes a useful appendage. Factory owners have managers; Wolfshiem has Gatsby.

Close to the end of the chapter, Nick and Jordan are driving through Central Park in a Victoria, a four-wheeled carriage for two passengers. They hear little girls singing a song, "The Sheik of Araby": "I'm the Sheik of Araby, / Your love belongs to me. / At night when you're asleep, / Into your tent I'll creep—." The dialogue that immediately follows the song is a play on words.

"It was a strange coincidence," I said.

"But it was not a coincidence at all." (62)

Ostensibly the subject is the house that Gatsby bought across the bay from Daisy; but actually the words refer to the song, which functions as a choric comment on Gatsby's love for Daisy.

The coincidence is that the children should be singing the song just as Nick and Jordan pass them while talking about Gatsby.⁴

Chapter six, which features the famous scene of Gatsby throwing his expensive shirts on the bed for Daisy's benefit, includes a telling pun on money and class. Nick says of Gatsby: "He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared round at his possessions in a dazed way as though in her actual astounding presence none of it was any longer real" (my emphasis; 72). Infected with the Daisy virus, Gatsby has amassed a fortune to attract her. Now he values his possessions in light of her values, that is, in a "dazed" way, in a Daisy way.

The next chapter (six) finds Gatsby telling Tom, "I know your wife" (80), a timeworn sexual pun. At this point Gatsby has discharged all his servants so that Daisy can visit him every afternoon unobserved.

Chapter seven includes a pun on Alexander Graham Bell's wind-up Victrolas and their record labels, "The Master's Voice." After describing the heat of the day and the train ride to the Buchanan house, Nick says, "Through the hall of the Buchanan's house blew a faint wind, carrying the sound of the telephone bell out to Gatsby and me as we waited at the door." The butler roars into the mouthpiece, "The master's body! . . . I'm sorry Madame but we can't furnish it—it's far too hot to touch this noon" (89).

As we know, the butler's actual words were: "Yes . . . yes . . . I'll see." But Nick's initial response, which projects his own guilty knowledge onto the butler, resonates with other meanings. The caller is Tom's mistress, a woman whose pulchritudinous allure has led Tom to set her up in a New York apartment. At the moment he is not available to her; he can't be immediately touched. Like everyone else, Tom is boiling, but not just from the heat. He is also steaming about his mistress calling him at home, and will shortly come undone about Gatsby's having won Daisy's affections. The master's body also speaks indirectly to the patriarchal society that Daisy poignantly captures when she says that "the best thing a girl can be in this world [is] a beautiful little fool" (17). An accomplished, intelligent woman has little or no chance of succeeding. Daisy, herself clever and conscious of the subordinate role of women, knows that for a girl to survive, beauty and obtuseness are her greatest assets, for whatever her gifts or lack thereof the master's body (or voice) will always prevail; he will always be too hot to touch.

A few pages later in chapter seven, Fitzgerald gives us what is perhaps the most quoted line in the novel, "Her voice is full of money" (94). Although the statement refers to Daisy's class and tastes, it also recasts the old saying, "Put your money where your mouth is." Daisy is so imbued with wealth that her voice has transmogrified into money. Note that neither Nick nor Gatsby says that her voice sounds like money. The statement is delivered not as a simile but as a metaphor. Her voice and money are synonymous; they are virtual correlatives. So accustomed is Daisy to affluence that she exudes it in her voice; it is Gatsby's summons, the voice that told him that Daisy could be won only by money. What Gatsby failed to hear in her voice was the kind of money that Daisy valued—upper-class, old wealth, not that of the get-rich-quick crowd, the upstarts, the criminals like Wolfshiem. Without knowing what Tom was telling Daisy when Nick peeked through the kitchen window (113), we can probably guess, given Tom's prejudices, that he was telling Daisy that Gatsby was in the employ of a gangster who fixed the 1919 World Series, and who moreover was a Jew (Brucoli in Gatsby liv and 148).

In chapter nine, when Nick answers the phone and learns that the big bond caper has led to an arrest, a pun similar to the last one indicates that in addition to the game being fatally over—Gatsby is dead—the famous "gonnection" between Gatsby and Wolfshiem has been severed, as well as all the telephone calls from Chicago.

"Look here—this isn't Mr. Gatsby. Mr. Gatsby's dead."

"There was a long silence on the other end of the wire followed by an exclamation . . . then a quick squawk as the connection was broken." (my emphasis; 129)

Nick's connections suffer a similar fate. Try as he does to connect with people who knew Gatsby, in the hope that they will agree to attend the funeral, his calls go unreturned. Except for Klipspringer inquiring about his tennis shoes, and Gatsby's father arriving at the house, and Owl Eyes appearing at the cemetery, all the old connections are terminally broken, including the one with Gatsby's partner. Wolfshiem refuses to attend Gatsby's funeral, saying, "When a man gets killed I never like to get mixed up in it in any way" (133).

The irony here is that the proverb "silence never betrays" gets turned on its head. All the silent people are, to one degree or another, betrayers, especially Daisy.

The wordplay that accompanies the description of Wolfshiem's office borders on the radical, if not scandalous, unless Fitzgerald means to be cruelly amusing; but on whom is the joke? Even though Wolfshiem is Jewish, the door that leads into his outer office is marked "The Swastika Holding Company," and in his inner office he is whistling, "The Rosary." On August 7, 1920, at the Salzburg Conference, the swastika became the official symbol of the German National Socialist Party. Why would he exhibit on his office door this odious emblem? While it is true that the swastika dates from Neolithic times and can be found in old Sanskrit texts, by either summer 1922, when the principal action of the novel takes place, or April 1925, when it was published, this symbol clearly referred to a political group or class of people who had been spewing hate since 1918. Is Fitzgerald trying to suggest that Wolfshiem's criminal behavior is tantamount to Fascism? If so, the comparison fails to work. Wolfshiem is a sharpie, a confidence man, a gambler, and a thief, but not a bigot and a racist. Perhaps Fitzgerald wishes to portray Wolfshiem as trying to hide his Jewish identity under a false banner. But many of the people around Arnold Rothstein (the real Wolfshiem) were Jewish, for example, Julius Arnstein (Nicky), Arthur Flegenheimer (Dutch Schultz), Meyer Lansky, Louis Lepke, Jacob Shapiro (Gurrah), Benjamin Siegel (Bugsy), Irving Wexler (Waxey Gordon). More likely, then, Fitzgerald is trying to signal that Wolfshiem and his gangster associates are bomb throwers, a class of people who are in their own way as subversive as the Nazis are in theirs.

In the same vein, "The Rosary" is not a song that a Jewish man would be whistling, nor would the National Socialists. Are we again to conclude that Wolfshiem wishes to make people think that he is not Jewish? The words of the song are revealing.

The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,
Are as a string of pearls to me;
I count them over ev'ry one apart,
My rosary, my rosary.

Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer
To still a heart in absence wrung:
I tell each bead unto the end,
And there a cross is hung!

O memories that bless and burn!
O barren gain and bitter loss!
I kiss each bead and strive at last to learn
To kiss the cross, sweetheart, to kiss the cross.

Unless the song is meant as an indirect reference to Gatsby and Daisy, it makes no sense in this context. Finally, we have the El Greco wordplay. In his "more fantastic dreams," Nick imagines scenes of West Egg that recall El Greco. It is this part of Long Island that has been settled by the nouveaux riches, an acquisitive society. The decadence and gloom, the insensitivity and ludicrous display of wealth all surface in Nick's dream of men carrying a nameless drunken woman on a stretcher, a woman whom no one cares to identify, and "gravely . . . [turning] in at a house—the wrong house" (my emphasis; 137). The picture might properly be titled "The Grave" or "Death" or "The Charnel House," all words and expressions that reflect Nick's feelings about his Babylonian captivity in the East.

But what are his alternatives? While the morals of the East are contemptible, those of the Midwest are insufferable. Turning back the clock rarely if ever works in a social and cultural context because the idea is anti-progressive. Although Gatsby memorably says, "'Can't repeat the past?' . . . 'Why of course you can!'" (86), he fails in the attempt, as do the others. Old money may enable its holders to live a life of arrested development—Tom has not matured beyond his football days at Yale and converts his garage back to a stable; and Daisy (despite her intelligence) and Jordan behave like southern belles who dwell in the nostalgia of an innocent youth. But if they escape their misdeeds, as Nick says, by "[retreating] back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together" (139), their retreat comes at a great moral price to them and their country.

The juxtaposition of money and carelessness brilliantly crystallizes the defects of capitalism. If The Great Gatsby is revolutionary, it is partly because Fitzgerald shows how the class divisions that set "old money" against "new money" and both against the poor invite the development of a third kind of money, Wolfshiem's and Gatsby's kind, gangster gelt, which is a "social disease" of capitalism. At the outset, Gatsby exhibits revolutionary energies, but his is a revolution gone wrong, corrupted by capitalist values. The tragedy of James Gatz is not that he abandoned honest (Horatio Alger, St. Olaf's) capitalism for dishonest (Wolfshiem) capitalism, but that he never envisioned an alternative to a class structure in which the rich grow richer, and the poor poorer. Hence the repeated comment that the novel sounds the death knell of the American Dream. Fitzgerald clearly sympathizes with the working classes, portraying wealth negatively and painting snobbery as an instrument of cruelty. The idyllic America of Dutch sailors' eyes and Captain John Smith is a dead hope. "If a man works but three days in seven," wrote Smith, "he may get more than he can spend unless he be excessive. For our pleasure here," Smith rhapsodized, "is still gains" (347). The lure of riches brought millions to these shores, and ruined millions more. But neither recklessness nor rapacity killed Gatsby and Myrtle. They were victimized by their pasts. Without old wealth and family ties they were outclassed. Small wonder, then, that Fitzgerald is ruing the loss of an Edenic America and dreaming of a classless one.

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Notes

¹ In a telephone call several years ago with Matthew J. Bruccoli, I asked him about the puns in The Great Gatsby, and he replied that he thought Fitzgerald rather humorless. I must, in the spirit of revolution, beg to differ.

² Fitzgerald frequently misspelled words. In the Cambridge Edition (147), Bruccoli points out that the phrase is obscure, and that Fitzgerald might have confused "urban" and "urbane." Either way, the pun remains the same.

³ See Bruccoli (Gatsby 191) for a brief list of articles about the puns.

⁴ Sean O'Casey uses this technique to great effect in Juno and the Paycock, when Captain Boyle and Joxer are indoors rhapsodizing about the stars, and outside on the street a coal vendor is hawking coal. The contrast between the fanciful and the real becomes starkly apparent in the juxtaposition.