***The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald***

***Novel - Modernist novel, Jazz Age novel, novel of manners, sociological novel?***

***time and place - summer 1922, New York and Long Island***

***PLOT***

Nick Carraway, a young man from Minnesota, moves to New York in the summer of 1922 to learn about the bond business. He rents a house in the West Egg district of Long Island, a wealthy but unfashionable area populated by the new rich, a group who have made their fortunes too recently to have established social connections and who are prone to garish displays of wealth. Nick’s next-door neighbor in West Egg is a mysterious man named Jay Gatsby, who lives in a gigantic Gothic mansion and throws extravagant parties every Saturday night.

Nick is unlike the other inhabitants of West Egg—he was educated at Yale and has social connections in East Egg. Nick drives out to East Egg one evening for dinner with his cousin, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband, Tom, a classmate of Nick’s at Yale. Daisy and Tom introduce Nick to Jordan Baker, a beautiful, cynical young woman with whom Nick begins a romantic relationship. Nick also learns a bit about Daisy and Tom’s marriage: Jordan tells him that Tom has a lover, Myrtle Wilson, who lives in the valley of ashes, a gray industrial dumping ground between West Egg and New York City. Not long after this revelation, Nick travels to New York City with Tom and Myrtle. At a vulgar, gaudy party in the apartment that Tom keeps for the affair, Myrtle begins to taunt Tom about Daisy, and Tom responds by breaking her nose.

As the summer progresses, Nick eventually garners an invitation to one of Gatsby’s legendary parties. He encounters Jordan Baker at the party, and they meet Gatsby himself, a surprisingly young man who affects an English accent, has a remarkable smile, and calls everyone “old sport.” Gatsby tells Jordan that he knew Daisy in Louisville in 1917 and is deeply in love with her. He spends many nights staring at the green light at the end of her dock, across the bay from his mansion. Gatsby’s extravagant lifestyle and wild parties are simply an attempt to impress Daisy. Gatsby now wants Nick to arrange a reunion between himself and Daisy. Nick invites Daisy to have tea at his house, without telling her that Gatsby will also be there. After an initially awkward reunion, Gatsby and Daisy re-establish their connection. Their love rekindled, they begin an affair.

After a short time, Tom grows increasingly suspicious of his wife’s relationship with Gatsby. At a luncheon at the Buchanan’s’ house, Gatsby stares at Daisy with such undisguised passion that Tom realizes Gatsby is in love with her. Though Tom is himself involved in an extramarital affair, he is deeply outraged by the thought that his wife could be unfaithful to him. He forces the group to drive into New York City, where he confronts Gatsby in a suite at the Plaza Hotel. Tom asserts that he and Daisy have a history that Gatsby could never understand, and he announces to his wife that Gatsby is a criminal—his fortune comes from bootlegging alcohol and other illegal activities. Daisy realizes that her allegiance is to Tom, and Tom contemptuously sends her back to East Egg with Gatsby, attempting to prove that Gatsby cannot hurt him.

When Nick, Jordan, and Tom drive through the valley of ashes, however, they discover that Gatsby’s car has struck and killed Myrtle, Tom’s lover. They rush back to Long Island, where Nick learns from Gatsby that Daisy was driving the car when it struck Myrtle, but that Gatsby intends to take the blame. The next day, Tom tells Myrtle’s husband, George, that Gatsby was the driver of the car. George, who has leapt to the conclusion that the driver of the car that killed Myrtle must have been her lover, finds Gatsby in the pool at his mansion and shoots him dead. He then fatally shoots himself.

Nick stages a small funeral for Gatsby, ends his relationship with Jordan, and moves back to the Midwest to escape the disgust he feels for the people surrounding Gatsby’s life and for the emptiness and moral decay of life among the wealthy on the East Coast. Nick reflects that just as Gatsby’s dream of Daisy was corrupted by money and dishonesty, the American dream of happiness and individualism has disintegrated into the mere pursuit of wealth. Though Gatsby’s power to transform his dreams into reality is what makes him “great,” Nick reflects that the era of dreaming—both Gatsby’s dream and the American dream—is over.

***MAIN CHARACTERS***

*Nick Carraway* – West Egg

* Narrator of the story (doesn’t get involved)
* Old friend of Tom Buchanon
* Cousin of Daisy
* Neighbour (and friend) of Gatsby

*Jay Gatsby (James Gatz) – West Egg*

* Mysterious background
* New money (nouveau riche)
* Extravagant parties

- Mr. Gatz has created an image of himself that is vastly different from who he used to be.

- The image of Gatsby:
- Oxford man
- War hero
- Wealthy and rich man

*Daisy Buchanan – East Egg*

* Married to Tom
* Cousin of Nick
* Somehow knows Gatsby from the past

*Tom Buchanan – East Egg*

- One of the richest families in America - Aristocracy

* Athlete - Played polo on a national level
* Has an affair with Myrtle
* Married to Daisy

***MINOR CHARACTERS***

*Jordan Baker – East Egg*

* Friend of Daisy (and Tom)
* Famous model
* Professional golfer
* Artistocracy; parents have died
* Helps Nick meet Gatsby

*Myrtle Wilson – Valley of Ashes*

* *Tom Buchanon’s mistress*
* *Voluptuous woman*

*George Wilson – Valley of Ashes*

* *Myrtle’s husband*
* *Car mechanic*
* *Physical labourer / lower class*

*Meyer Wolfsheim* – New York?

* An important figure in organized crime
* Friend of Gatsby

***THEMES***

*The American dream*

- Original: The first settlers came to America to start a new life in a country that had yet to be formed. Their aim was to create a new, perfect society; a ‘city on a hill’ that all other countries and cultures look up to.

- The New American Dream: The Great Gatsby describes the American Dream of the 1920’s as **an insatiable hunger for money and pleasure**.

*The roaring twenties*

- A time of great economic prosperity

- Industrialisation and especially **mass production** made new technology available to the middle class. The most visible example of such developments is the rise of the automobile industry.

- The stock market exploded and lured young individuals to the city, hoping to get their share of the seemingly limitless amounts of money that were being earned.

- Urbanization

- Individualisation: everyone wanted their shot at becoming rich (The New American Dream)

- Infrastructure: highways, skyscrapers, bigger factories, bigger mansions.

- Prohibition and Women’s suffrage (18th and 19th amendment)

- Ban on alcohol; Women got the right to vote

*Old money vs. new money (the difference between social classes)*

- New Money (Gatsby; West Egg)

- Putting their money on display

- Aim to be seen as ‘selfmade’ men

- Affiliated with criminal circuit

- Old Money (Tom; East Egg)

- Supposed to be upholding the moral standard

- Only socialize within their own class.

- Cynical and hollow in The Great Gatsby

*Gatsby’s dream*

- At various points in the novel, we read about a green light. Mostly, Gatsby is staring into this light with great desire. It could be said that the Green Light represents Gatsby’s personal dream or desire (symbol).

- Gatsby’s parties are a display of wealth and pleasure (The American Dream), but how does the American Dream relate to Gatsby’s personal desire?

***Symbols***

- The green light on Daisy’s dock (stands for future hopes and the American dream)

- The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg (may stand for God staring down or the meaninglessness of the world)

- The valley of ashes (symbolizes the plight of the poor)

***Narrator***

Nick Carraway, the main character in the story, is also the narrator. He tells the story from a first-person point of view, but also third-person point of view. This also means it is a limited point of view.