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Queer Representation: Revitilizing F. Scott Fitzgerald's Place in the American Literary Canon

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by

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ABSTRACT

F. Scott Fitzgerald is colloquially known as one of the great American writers. His acclaim is most commonly attributed to his depiction of heterosexual romances set during the Jazz Age. However, under the surface, many of the male characters that he represents display queer behaviors that subvert this idea. The texts analyzed here include "The Rich Boy" (1926), *Tender is the Night* (1934), and *The Great* Gatsby (1925). These men commonly avoid perpetuating heteronormative culture, projecting a general air of cynicism towards the institution of marriage, and a subtle inclination towards feminine characteristics and queer love. Overall, the inclusion of these characters does not only serve to complicate our understanding of primary themes in Fitzgerald's writing, but also further testifies to the presence of queer people and behavior throughout history.

Keywords: F. Scott Fitzgerald, queer theory, "The Rich Boy", *The Great Gatsby*, *Tender is the Night*.

DEDICATION

Throughout history, the lives of many queer people were covered up and erased. Queer history and queer theory as subjects are so new because the thought of writing about such a taboo subject was scandalous. This thesis is dedicated to all of the people who had their story erased simply because of who they loved or how they identified.

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"Begin with an individual, and before you know it you find that you have created a type; begin with a type, and you find you have created–nothing. That is because we are all queer fish, queerer behind our faces and voices than we want any one to know or than we know ourselves" - F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Rich Boy" (1926)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories are known for their romantic themes and seem to perpetuate the promise of heteronormativity. However, their narratives rarely lead to happy endings and seem instead to offer a tragic display of completely failed heteronormative relationships. Fitzgerald's lofty writing style allows readers to focus primarily on the intense love affairs his work has embodied. Specifically, Fitzgerald tends to write with figurative language, leaning heavily on imagery and metaphors to create a sense of wistfulness and desire. Fitzgerald's stylistic choices are intended to encourage the idea of romanticism in his works, which is always specifically directed toward encouraging and celebrating heterosexual love. However, I will argue that many instances in his works subvert heteronormativity; in fact, close critical reading reveals that Fitzgerald's novels and short stories are rampant with queer pining. Fitzgerald, however unconsciously, consistently showcases closeted queer male characters who flee from long-term heterosexual relationships, project their frustrations with sexuality onto

others, and go to great lengths to keep up the façade of heterosexuality. On the rare occasions when Fitzgerald explicitly represents queer characters, his unapologetically homophobic portrayal appears to deepen his supposed commitment to heteronormativity, belying the more truly ambivalent position his novels and short stories exhibit towards sexuality.

Fitzgerald's queer characters are typically subtle due to the homophobia (or general distaste for homosexuality) that these works perpetuate. However, using queer theory I will show how there are certain patterns and formal choices in his prose that flag queerness. Fitzgerald uses elisions and omissions regularly, as often his male characters are the narrators (or are very close to the narrator) who strategically exclude critical details of their conversations or circumstances. He also liberates his closeted queer characters by allowing them to escape their confining home; this freedom frequently leads to events that subvert heteronormativity. His portrayal of gender is also telling, as characters will body double with each other, project onto one another, and perceive each other in nontraditional ways (such as subconsciously assigning masculine characteristics to a female character). Finally, the consistent failure of straight relationships in these texts can be interpreted as a deeply felt suspicion of heteronormative institutions and/or the failure of these men to comply to that culture. These motifs lend themselves to many different interpretations, but utilizing the scrutiny of queer analytical theory and historical context indicates their relation to queer activity. Furthermore, critical theorist Lois Tyson writes that queer theory focuses on how being gay "influence(s) the way one sees the world, sees oneself and others, creates and responds to art and music, creates and interprets literature, experiences and expresses emotion" (331). These elements of

perception contribute to the instances mentioned above and are the ultimate focus when utilizing queer theory. How does the act of being gay/queer affect the story? If we scrutinize Fitzgerald's seemingly heterosexual characters and they line up with queer elements, how does that alter the way we perceive the narrative, his larger influence in the American literary canon, and how he may resonate with contemporary audiences?

My focus is primarily on characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novella "The Rich Boy" (1926), and his novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Tender is the Night* (1934). Each of these texts demonstrates queerness in different ways. "The Rich Boy" creates a portrait of a man who seems to embody the ideal American male stereotype: rich, white, straight, and masculine. However, despite these purported attributes, he never fully engages with the institution of marriage (and thus the compulsion to reproduce his status in offspring) and, in fact, pathologically avoids it. *Tender is the Night* exhibits explicitly queer characters only to immediately silence them after. However, in this novel, it is not only the explicitly queer characters that work against heteronormativity, but also the main characters who engage in extramarital affairs and are unfaithful to the traditional idea of heterosexual relationships. Finally, *The Great Gatsby* comes closest to exhibiting queer love in-depth—the first-person novel allows readers to experience the narrator's infatuation with the titular character.

Each of these novels develops a picture of queerness within the Fitzgerald canon that is fluid and dynamic, as is queer life. Queer elements come to light in many ways, but in the Fitzgerald oeuvre, it manifests in a particularly distinct way. The most common of these indicators arise from a failure in perpetuating heteronormativity, such as (but not limited to) the failure of heterosexual relationships, avoiding heterosexual commitment,

or otherwise behaving in a way to negate personal responsibility but avert expectations of participation in heterosexuality. Another one of these signals is the creation of an air of abnormality. Characters are distanced both by the language of the novel and by the actions of other characters, which further perpetuates this abnormality and indicates that these characters possess queer traits or tendencies. This abnormality can manifest itself in aligning characters of the opposite gender with each other, such as men behaving as women or vice versa. The last queer element that will be mentioned here involves real participation in queer events such as the discussion of being queer and engaging with queer love. Explicit queer love does not happen often within Fitzgerald works, and without scrutiny, can be glossed over or ignored by readers if they wish. An analytical perspective regarding queerness creates a different reputation for Fitzgerald; his thematic vision is not only based on whimsical heterosexual romance, but also showcases an underlying presence of queer life. Literary analysis will not go as far as to dictate whether characters are homosexual (unless otherwise stated by the source text) but will highlight instances that could align these characters with motifs related to queerness.

There is also an intense historical context surrounding Fitzgerald's queer-coded characters. Fitzgerald wrote and published his works in the 1920s, a simultaneously turbulent and indulgent time for Americans. George Chauncey, a queer historian, writes that "anti-gay hostility prevented the development of an extensive gay subculture and forced gay men to lead solitary lives in the decades before the rise of the gay liberation movement" (17). The hostile environment that society unfortunately forged for queer people identifies some historical significance for the nuance of what it means to be queer within Fitzgerald's works. Queer men of the time needed to rely on subtlety and delicacy

when it came to who was aware of their deviation from heterosexuality. They relied on devising separate worlds and signifying systems from that of the mainstream. The historical context surrounding Fitzgerald's oeuvre informs how these characters navigate their sexuality, manifesting itself in actions such as separating their social circles, participating in extramarital affairs, or otherwise distancing themselves from sexuality. Fitzgerald's characters are not frequently analyzed through the lens of queer theory. The conversation around Fitzgerald's work has been standardized to focus on his heterosexual romances, the perpetuation of the supposed American dream, and the glamour of the 1920s. This thesis intends to work against the way Fitzgerald is typically viewed in the American literary canon.

To begin, take Fitzgerald's late novel *Tender is the Night* (1934), where the author appears to pass moral judgment on homosexual characters. The story begins on the French Riviera, where a host of characters are vacationing together on the beach, including Nicole and Dick Diver, a married couple, and other expatriates, Mr. McKisco, Mr. Campion, and Mr. Dumphry. This section of the novel is told through the perspective of Rosemary Hoyt, a young American actress on holiday with her mother. Notably, she is an outsider to the group, as she has only just arrived. At one point, Nicole Diver hands her husband Dick a pair of swimming trunks she had been mending. The scene unfolds:

> He [Dick] went into the dressing tent and inspired a commotion by appearing in a moment clad in the transparent black lace drawers. Close inspection revealed that they were lined with flesh-colored cloth.

> "Well, if that isn't a pansy's trick!" exclaimed Mr. McKisco contemptuously–then turning quickly to Mr. Dumphry and Mr. Campion, he added, "Oh, I beg your pardon." (26)

Nicole giving Dick the garment reflects the power dynamic between the pair: Nicole is in control and Dick will submit to her wishes. The move is distinctly emasculating and introduces the idea that their marriage deviates from the norm. Furthermore, McKisco's need to apologize for his choice of language exhibits a certain awareness of Dumphry and Campion's sexuality. His comment also confirms their homosexuality; ultimately, it will be the only meaningful trait the book assigns to the pair. Considering that *Tender is the Night* is Fitzgerald's only novel to represent explicitly queer characters, the discussion around them becomes much more vital. Their introduction through insult, despite McKisco's apology, sets a tone of homophobia within this novel. McKisco is not sorry for what he said; he is sorry for saying it in their presence. Campion and Dumphry are the first homosexual characters introduced in this novel and are the first to receive this treatment, but not the last.

One of the novel's main characters, Rosemary Hoyt, does not treat Campion with the same candor as McKisco. Shortly after this moment on the beach, Rosemary stumbles upon Campion weeping. Internally, she compares him to a woman, feminizing his tears by saying that "he was weeping hard and quietly and shaking in the same parts as a weeping woman" (52). However, at this point, she still holds some compassion for him and attempts to comfort him as best she can. She presses him for information regarding his woes, and he hesitates but ultimately decides to open up to her a small amount. Campion proceeds to lament his love life, saying, "When you're older you'll know what

people who love suffer. The agony. It's better to be cold and young than to love. It's happened to me before but never like this–so accidental–just when everything was going well" (52). The way that Campion talks about his love affair, that is, notably, only discussed in this instance, possesses the same kind of romanticism as Fitzgerald's heteronormative romances. Campion's affections are sincere, spontaneous, and all-encompassing. However, he holds back many details regarding this relationship, likely to avoid Rosemary's intolerance. The lack of detail is remarkable–granted, Campion is only a minor character, but a love affair is usually something that Fitzgerald would spend a lot of time developing. Campion's ability to sense that Rosemary will recoil from any direct reference to this aspect of himself is an indicator of his queerness. Tyson defines gay sensibility as "an awareness of being different, at least in certain ways, from the members of the mainstream, dominant culture, and the complex feelings that result from an implicit, ongoing social oppression" (331). His awareness of his own abnormality further underscores Campion's presence as a queer character, as he can recognize his peculiarity compared to Rosemary.

Once Rosemary recognizes the implications of Campion's words, she promptly loses any sympathy she felt, and regards Campion with disgust:

> His face was repulsive in the quickening light. Not by a flicker of her personality, a movement of the smallest muscle, did she betray her sudden disgust with whatever it was. But Campion's sensitivity realized it and he changed the subject rather suddenly. (52)

The confessional between Campion and Rosemary perpetuates the homophobic tone further and shows that it persists in both public and private settings within the novel.

Pascale Antolin, a Fitzgerald critic, writes, “Fitzgerald is never a passive witness of the events he relates. In all of his books he passes moral judgment, often resorting to irony to satirize the damaging effects of modernity on his contemporaries” (Antolin 114). Fitzgerald’s choice to criticize and mock Campion through Rosemary’s perspective is a testament to this claim. Even McKisco’s earlier reaction holds up to this idea. Fitzgerald is trying to convey to readers that he distrusts queer lifestyles and interprets them as negative effects of modernity. Ironically, Rosemary herself is more like Campion than she may realize. At the time of their encounter, Rosemary has fallen in love with Dick Diver, an older, married, professional psychologist, and thus an inappropriate love match. The novel’s plot begins with the details of these circumstances, positioning Rosemary and Dick as star-crossed lovers. Initially, Dick is unable to participate in this affair because of his commitment to Nicole, his wife. Rosemary, unintentionally, is working against the heteronormative institution of marriage and wedges herself between the two. This instance between Rosemary and Campion lamenting about love does more than emphasize Fitzgerald’s homophobic tone; it strikes a parallel between two characters who subvert the rules of a heteronormative culture. Rosemary’s inability to recognize the similarities between herself and Campion exhibits not only her innocence but her commitment to the idea of homosexuality being an “other.” She has (or society has done it for her) ostracized queer persons so much that she cannot picture herself relating to Campion, even as she projects her own shame on to him.

Another explicitly queer character in *Tender is the Night* is represented much later in the novel. Dick Diver, still trapped in an unhappy marriage to Nicole, gets wind of a job in Lausanne from his business partner, Franz. Dick has slowly begun to deteriorate in

his own moral behavior, drinking heavily and philandering. Franz has noticed and is looking for a way to get out of his friendship and business dealings with Dick. Dick, emotionally drained from both his job and a physical beating he took in Italy, tries to allude to Franz that he needs a break. Instead, Franz takes this opportunity to "insert the first wedge" and sends Dick to a client in Lausanne to cure him of his homosexual urges (312). Francisco, the client, is the son of a wealthy Spanish man. The conversations regarding Francisco are very hostile. His father, when speaking about him, says, "My son is corrupt. He was corrupt at Harrow, he was corrupt at King's College, Cambridge. He's incorrigibly corrupt. Now that there is this drinking it is more and more obvious how he is, and there is continual scandal" (313). This discussion is clinical and detached, evoking a sense of disdain from father to son. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a renowned queer theorist, writes in her book *Epistomology of the Closet* (1990) that, "it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know" (3). The impact of sexuality on speech and perception is imperative now; seeing as his father has taken issue with his sexuality, his manner of speaking about his son is hostile and unloving. He dehumanizes Francisco further with a cruel beating, saying he "made Francisco strip to the waist and lashed him with a whip" (313). Dr. Diver is his last hope to cure his son. These choices are no accident, as Fitzgerald uses this relationship between father and son to further emphasize his supposed disdain for the queer experience.

Furthermore, after speaking with the affected man for a short time, Dick tells him: "It's a hole-and-corner business at best…You'll spend your life on it, and its consequences, and you won't have time or energy for any other decent or social act. If

you want to face the world you'll have to begin by controlling your sensuality" (314). Again Fitzgerald presents an ironic, if unintentional parallel: Dick himself has fallen victim to sexual temptations and seems to be projecting his own need for greater discretion onto this client. The intention of the scene between Dick Diver and Franz initially seems to perpetuate homophobia by suggesting that it can and should be cured. However, Dick's character development throughout the novel shows that he himself struggles with temptation. Dick, the romantic and academic hero, engages in multiple extramarital affairs, thus undermining the institution of marriage and jeopardizing his family. A. Wilber Stevens, a Fitzgerald critic, asserts that "[Dick] does not know what he wants. In his family and in his training, he has, we are told, been given all the codes and all the answers" (102). Dick Diver is an imperfect man who maintains the aura of what is perceived to be the classic Fitzgerald archetype: a smart, rich, handsome, straight, white man. The conflict that he experiences between performing societal norms and deviating from them encourages distrust in the most foundational heterosexual institution: marriage. This is a common motif throughout Fitzgerald's oeuvre and continues to be a great indicator of a queer presence within his works.

Fitzgerald's engagement with deviations from heterosexual norms can also be seen in earlier work, such as one of his most highly praised novellas, "The Rich Boy" (1926). The story is about Anson Hunter, a man born into great wealth. He is described as charming, intelligent, and charismatic; a great candidate for marriage and procreation, but with a strong vice for drinking. Anson is reportedly devoted to his romantic interest, Paula Legendre, but there are significant problems that impede their relationship from lasting commitment. The most notable issue the couple faces involves Anson's

dependence on alcohol, which overshadows his devotion to Paula and ultimately leads to the demise of their romantic relationship. During a conversation about his alcoholism, the narrator writes that “Oddly enough, Anson was as engrossed in the dialogue as she was and as profoundly affected by it, yet at the same time aware that on his side much was insincere, and on hers much was merely simple” (320). He does not provide details of their conversation, meaning that readers do not know exactly what Anson was being insincere about, nor why Paula was being simple. An absence of detail in Fitzgerald's dialogue is unusual; his writing style is often the exact opposite, being extremely detailed, visual, and representational, exploiting every moment that could be perceived as romantic or meaningful. However, in this situation, where Anson and Paula are having a difficult, likely unhappy conversation, its content is left up to the reader’s imagination. The lack of information effectively blocks readers from fully understanding the complexity of Anson’s character or the reason behind his failure to commit to Paula. This absence of detail is an elision, where content is consciously left out of a work, in this case, by the characters themselves. Depending on the context, there may be different reasons for this choice, but one explanation is that the text is repressing hidden truths about the characters. Peter Barry, a critical theorist, defines repression as “the ‘forgetting’ or ignoring of unresolved conflicts, or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and into the realm of the unconscious” (98). When queering Anson, it becomes clear that many of his actions could be explained by an intense repression of queer tendencies. The unresolved conflict of queerness for Anson has manifested in his reliance on substance abuse, and in turn, pushing Paula away, refusing to perpetuate the

heteronormative, capitalist culture he was born into and should presumably be in the position to lead.

The lack of detail in this private conversation between Anson and Paula could be due to the separation between the narrator and the situation. He is relaying the events to us and does not influence the story. However, we are told that these conversations are the foundation of their relationship and thus ought to give readers the insight to understand their relationship. The narrator goes on to write that their conversations were "composed on both sides of immature and even meaningless statements–the emotional content that gradually came to fill it grew up not out of the words but out of its enormous seriousness" (320). The way that their relationship is described feels exceedingly staged and void of substance. Given Fitzgerald's preference for the idea of an intense, all-encompassing love, this depiction of the primary romantic relationship in the story seems odd. Paula and Anson's relationship seems to be the antithesis of the kind of "true love" that Fitzgerald usually writes about, suggesting its falseness from the start. The narrator continues, saying that Anson felt that "if he could enter into Paula's warm safe life he would be happy" (321). This comment is unexpected; Anson is rich and charming, and we are repeatedly told that he is at the center of every group in his life. It seems that Paula and Anson have made some kind of tacit agreement to perform an unconventional kind of affection. They agree to marry very quickly, and there is very little time spent on the details of it all. The fact that he refers to Paula's life as being safe instead of a more tender descriptor indicates that this situation is a relationship of convenience rather than of love. This discussion and oddity of their relationship suggests that the pair may be engaged in a relationship that is lavender in nature. In the early twentieth century,

specifically in Hollywood, actors would engage in “lavender marriages” to conceal their sexuality. Teresa Theophano, a queer studies author, writes that the term “lavender marriage” was “coined to describe nuptials between gay male and lesbian stars for reasons of career insurance and social approval” (132-133). Considering that Anson’s ideas about his relationship with Paula rely on the fact that she is “safe,” it is not out of the realm of possibility that this is a marriage of convenience or social standing. His reliance on her to maintain the idea that he fits in heterosexual society contributes to the desperation he feels towards her—Anson needs to keep Paula on and by his side in order to perpetuate the expectations of heterosexual society.

Shortly after getting engaged, the pair agree to attend a party together in the country. Anson immediately undermines his intention for safety with Paula; despite their plans together, he “met friends at five o’clock and drunk freely and indiscreetly with them for an hour” before showing up to receive Paula (321). His state greatly embarrasses Paula, who must escort him away quickly before her mother sees him. Furthermore, as they leave to take dinner, the narrator writes that “when Paula and Anson descended to the limousine they found two men inside, both asleep; they were the men with whom he had been drinking at the Yale Club, and they were also going to the party. He had entirely forgotten their presence in the car” (322). No matter how intoxicated Anson appears to be, it is quite odd that he would completely forget about two men with whom he had spent a good portion of time. The Yale Club, through the narrator's perspective, seems to be a gathering of bachelors as well. Alcohol is omissive in nature, allowing characters to ignore or feign ignorance to their actions. In Anson’s case, his dependance on the state of being intoxicated can indicate a need to omit aspects of

himself that he does not like or wants to obscure. It also makes the presence of two men, allegedly forgotten about, in the car to seem promiscuous. Furthermore, Niko Lewis, a Fitzgerald critic writes "Alcohol consumption figures prominently in the action with the influence of intoxication, whether by alcohol or an idea, directing the particular version of the stories the various characters believe…intoxication obscures the character's clarity of thinking" (119). The narrator is retelling Anson's story with an assumingly sober mind and passing upon their own judgment through their manner of retelling. However, that does not take away from the use of alcohol itself to influence how the story unfolds. Anson's alcoholism, according to Lewis, leads Anson to believe certain narratives and make decisions that he may not make otherwise. These ideas indicate that Anson's alcoholism acts as a liberating substance that enables him to slip into a permissive state and as an excuse to deny admission of any transgressive behavior.

Furthermore, Anson's corrupt behavior is fueled by the temptations he encounters as a wealthy New Yorker. Niko Lewis writes that, "New York at this time was seen as a source of new beginnings, with throngs of people migrating to the city in hope of a better future" (110). This idea proves to be true for Anson, as he centers his life in New York after his engagement with Paula is formally broken off:

> But the serious dialogue had turned a corner into a long-sustained quarrel, and the affair was almost played out. Anson got drunk flagrantly and missed an engagement with her, whereupon Paula made certain behavioristic demands. His despair was helpless before his pride and his knowledge of himself: the engagement was definitely broken. (325)

Neither of them seems to want the engagement to end, but as an obedient believer in the heteronormative standards of polite society, Paula is deeply embarrassed by Anson's actions and cannot continue to see him. Both parties seem to wish that things had ended differently, but Anson seems unwilling or unable to conform. The narrator of this story writes that "he plunged vigorously into all the movement and glitter of post-bellum New York, entering a brokerage house, joining half a dozen clubs, dancing late, and moving in three worlds–his own world, the world of young Yale graduates, and that section of the half-world which rests one end on Broadway" (325). The details regarding this "half-world" are not revealed to readers, creating yet another elision. However, in terms of history, this points to non-normative behavior. Chauncey writes that buildings on Broadway were "regularly taken over by hundreds of gay men after midnight…to an extent, gay men felt comfortable there" (187). Anson's involvement with nightlife is interesting, seeing as this exact habit is what drove a wedge between himself and Paula, but the historical context in conjunction with his continuance of bad habits indicates pathological behavior. The narrator consistently indicates that Anson wants Paula back, so his perpetuation of problematic behavior seems irrational. Tyson writes that "our repetition of destructive behavior reveals the existence of some significant psychological difficulty that has probably been influencing us for some time without our knowing it" (14). Anson chooses time to engage in destructive behaviors that would prevent himself from safe participation in heteronormativity in the way that society intends. Anson's inclination away from participating in heterosexual culture is a definably queer act.

In this case, the background of New York is increasingly important–in a different setting, Anson may find himself falling into different, maybe even more positive habits,

but New York provides him with the ability to compartmentalize his life in the city. When addressing the fragments of his life, the narrator writes that "He [Anson] had one of those invaluable minds with partitions in it; sometimes he appeared at his office refreshed by less than an hour's sleep, but such occurrences were rare" (325-326). These "partitions" indicate that Anson does not let his various social circles intersect—which further implicates the idea that these half-worlds have potential to be debaucherous or otherwise corruptive. Furthermore, Antolin writes that "the city remains nearly absent, an object of desire and a "city of paper" as it is appropriated, even transfigured, to serve the novelist's purpose" (115). In this instance, the heartbeat of New York is what allows Anson to move between these other worlds and prevent them from intersecting. The anonymity that a big city provides works towards his advantage. Furthermore, there are very few details given about Anson's differing worlds, leaving readers to fill in the gaps about what distinguishes them from one another. Regarding the world of young Yale graduates, the narrator explains:

> He [Anson] lived in a great house, and had the means of introducing young men into other great houses…They commenced to turn to him for amusement and escape, and Anson responded readily, taking pleasure in helping people and arranging their affairs. (326)

Anson does not seem to be woefully mourning the love that he lost nor the opportunity to marry, but instead sublimates his desire into helping others or diverting heteronormative behaviors onto these men. Anson is performing homemaking duties for these men, entertaining and helping them, thus giving the appearance of participating in heteronormative culture while remaining outside of it. The details surrounding this social

circle are questionable, implicating Anson's queer tendencies. Furthermore, these details inspire more questions regarding what defines the "half-world" on Broadway, but details elude readers. The purposeful elision of this significant part of Anson's night life is striking, considering he is the story's focus.

After learning of Paula's engagement and subsequent marriage to another man, Anson becomes involved with another woman named Dolly who is described in slightly misogynistic terms: "like so many girls of that day Dolly was slackly and indiscreetly wild" (330). It is unclear why the narrator might take on this tone, as Dolly is the first woman that Anson becomes attached to after reckoning with the fact that he has likely lost Paula as a romantic interest forever. Dolly realizes that it will be difficult to marry Anson but blames it on his family–the narrator further notes that this is untrue, writing that "she mistook the reason–she thought that Anson and his family expected a more spectacular marriage, but she guessed immediately that her advantage lay in his tendency to drink" (330). If the idea that Anson's drinking problem relates to his otherness in some ways, then it is canny of Dolly to realize that. If we buy into the idea that the marriage (or at least talks of it) between Anson and Paula was lavender in nature, Dolly might have noticed this about them and decided to chase after Anson for monetary reasons. Peter Wolfe, a Fitzgerald critic, writes that "Dolly resembles Anson Hunter as strikingly as Paula, who comes from a more prominent family, differs from him" (89). The parallel personality that Dolly and Anson share queers both of them—they participate in heterosexual culture in a way that is anything but normal. Anson runs from heterosexual institutions whereas Dolly seeks to exploit and profit from them.

As Dolly seeks to deepen their relationship, Anson placates her by creating another entirely different world. The details regarding this affair could be the missing piece of the "half-world" that was mentioned earlier—notably, it is anything other than heteronormative:

> They dropped out of their world for a while and made another world just beneath it where Anson's tippling and Dolly's irregular hours would be less noticed and commented on. It was composed, this world, of varying elements–several of Anson's Yale friends and their wives, two or three young brokers and bond salesmen and a handful of unattached men, fresh from college, with money and a propensity to dissipation. What this world lacked in spaciousness and scale it made up for by allowing them a liberty that it scarcely permitted itself. (330)

This alternate world they crafted for themselves further implicates the idea of Dolly and Anson's inclination towards deviancy. The half-world not only houses their transgressive behavior, but also the need for it, further othering the pair from traditional society. They feel the need to experience life outside of its traditional restraints. The text does not elaborate on what exactly they did in this other world, creating yet another suggestive elision, and instead seems to emphasize the large number of people that floated around inside of it for Dolly and Anson's amusement. It seems like, instead of Anson giving Dolly the attention she wanted, he chose to introduce her to other people who could do it for him, as shortly after this excerpt, we learn that Anson is not in love with her. As Dolly's family starts to close in on him and encourage the two to wed, Anson promptly dumps her in a short letter. However, instead of a heartbroken letter in return, the letter that Dolly writes back details her affection for another man. These similar actions deepen

the parallel between the parties, aligning Anson further with a non-heteronormative identity.

Dolly agrees to meet up with Anson and take a walk with him to discuss the state of their relationship. The two take a stroll outside, and shortly after, Anson details how hot he is and invites Dolly to his house. Anson has finally given in and has decided to follow through with Dolly's wishes. The invitation to his house is a subtle question, asking her if she wants to have sex with him. Dolly responds enthusiastically:

> She was happy; the intimacy of his being hot, of any physical fact about him, thrilled her. When they came to the iron-grated door and Anson took out his key, she experienced a sort of delight. (332)

The key combined with the fact that Anson is about to take his clothes off once they get inside lends itself fully to the idea that the two are about to engage in an act of intimacy. Dolly is obviously very eager, as she has been waiting for this for most of their relationship. He goes up to his room without her, but she soon follows him with the intent to flirt. Upon her arrival to his private quarters, the two embrace. It seems like they might actually have sex, like Anson might actually follow through, but; "still holding one another, they raised their heads–their eyes fell together upon Paula's picture, staring down at them from the wall" (332). The picture of Paula, the ultimate symbol of marriage and monogamy, renders Anson unable to perform. The two quickly part and Anson asks Dolly if she would like something to drink. That fact that Paula's picture hangs on the wall of Anson's room long after their love affair has ended is strange but notable. Her presence is almost specter-like, a haunting image of the past. Anson has every ability to remove these signifiers of his previous affairs, but he chooses to keep them, almost as an

unconscious tactic to sabotage any future relationships that might tame his personal life. If women like Dolly got too close, they are met with a man who seems to be still hopelessly attached to a relationship that he destroyed all on his own. Anson's shrine to Paula is not a sign of his love for her, but a kind of alibi to ward off any further responsibility of following the expectations of heterocentric society.

Despite Anson's unconscious cynicism towards the institution of marriage and the societal expectations of marriage, he experiences great anger when learning of an extramarital affair involving his aunt Edna and a younger man who is not his uncle. Anson bullies her into meeting up for lunch and proceeds to berate her to the point of tears. The narrator writes of the confrontation that:

> There would be the appeal to his chivalry, then to his pity, finally to his superior sophistication–when he had shouldered his way through all these there would be admissions, and he could come to grips with her. By being silent, by being impervious, by returning constantly to his main weapon, which was his own true emotion, he bullied her into frantic despair as the luncheon hour slipped away. (337)

Anson's intense anger regarding the situation seems uncharacteristic for his character, as he himself is single and his temperament is generally represented as either charming or humorously drunk. However, when considering his anger in light of his own failures to perform heteronormative behavior, it is a clear case of projection. Barry, writes that projection is "when aspects of ourselves (usually negative ones) are not recognized as part of ourselves but are perceived in or attributed to another; our own desires or antagonisms, for instance, may be "disowned" this way" (98). Edna's own subversion of

the institution of marriage is something that Anson cannot abide. He cannot deal with the fact that he also engages in similar behavior, and thus takes it upon himself to publicly reprimand her, threatening to ruin her life by telling both his uncle and the father of her lover about their sins against the institution of marriage. Wolfe writes that "perhaps sexual commitment in any form, even that of others, threatens him [Anson] so much that he must stamp it out" (88). Anson's pessimism towards heterosexual society has unconsciously caused him to lash out towards people that do not necessarily deserve it. With the way that his separate world with Dolly was described, under these same conditions, it is likely that he needs to be lambasted in a public way as well. Overall, Anson's cynicism towards marriage and ultimate failure to perform the duties imposed on him by heteronormative society is what queers him—the failure to perpetuate his social status and thus his family name through persistent self-sabotage solidifies him as a queer character within the Fitzgerald oeuvre.

Turning finally to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), likely his most widely known work, and one which ironically comes closest to exhibiting explicit queer love. The story of *The Great Gatsby* is one of seemingly long-suffering romance, old and new money, and the dynamics of power. Often, this story is touted as Fitzgerald's literary masterpiece. Otto Friedrich, a Fitzgerald critic, writes that "the most important element in the greatness of *The Great Gatsby*–and a direct result of his personal evolution–was that Fitzgerald finally tried to tell the truth" (397). The truth that Friedrich refers to is the reality of who Jay Gatsby, otherwise known as James Gatz, is, and the methodical unraveling of the lies he told. The plot of the novel is dictated through the first-person narration of Nick Carraway, who recounts his experience moving to Long Island and

mingling with his neighbors, including the titular Jay Gatsby. The choice to use Nick as a first-person narrator gives him the autonomy to shape the language and details surrounding his circumstances.

Nick begins his account of the momentous summer with a visit to the Daisy and Tom Buchanan, both of whom he has not seen in a long while. Daisy is Nick's second cousin and Tom is his former classmate from Yale. Nick's movement to Long Island is what ultimately brings them back together for a short period of time. Their home appears to be idyllic and exceptional, signifying their significant wealth and access to beauty and high society. Nick internalizes some thoughts regarding the distance between them, writing that "on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends whom I scarcely knew at all" (6). Nick takes the time to carefully establish himself as an outsider in this group. Nick's internal commentary comes into play often throughout the novel, often speaking alongside or disagreeing with the story he is telling. The conflict between Nick's perspective and the reality of his circumstances deepens Nick's presence as the narrator—what he presents to readers is his edited version of events. Despite Nick's autonomy, he cannot necessarily control what people say.

The warm, summer evening that Nick describes seems to be a very quintessentially Fitzgerald tableau. It emphasizes all of the motifs Fitzgerald bolsters through his writing, such as affluence, romanticism, beauty, and drama. During this dinner party, one of the first outside perspectives describing Nick comes from Daisy, who muses that:

> "I love to see you at my table, Nick. You remind me of–of a rose, an absolute rose. Doesn't he?" She turned to Miss Baker for confirmation: "An absolute rose?" This was untrue. I am not even faintly like a rose. (15)

A rose, being a flower, holds very feminine characteristics. This is a direct comparison of Nick to something he does not want to be known by, seen by his dismissive reaction. This adamant dissent could indicate the same kind of disgust that other Fitzgerald characters face when presented with a description that goes against normative presentations of masculinity. Moreover, Frances Kerr writes that Nick "publicly accepts but privately suffers under the elaborate gender politics that set the terms for men's social exchanges in this novel" (409-410). This interaction–namely his reaction and even the fact that Daisy would call him a rose–further emphasizes this point. Daisy, however unconsciously, is pointing out the distinct differences between Nick and her husband Tom. In comparison to Tom, an almost grotesque exaggeration of classic masculinity, Nick seems more feminine. Nick's reaction may signify a quiet embarrassment more than any kind of anger, as he is not meeting societal standards, so much so that even his second cousin recognizes it, even after a significant amount of time apart. Furthermore, Nick's clarification to readers rather than to the room itself deepens his connection to the idea of femininity. His unwillingness to engage in conflict continues to distinguish Nick from Tom, who is always correcting others. This reticence encourages his presence as a character who is othered and feminized, which cements his presence as a character who experiences queer tendencies. Nick continues to struggle with societal conventions, and some of this can be visualized in the way he perceives others.

The juxtaposition of Nick and Tom gives credence to this–Tom is very manly and described as strong, whereas Nick is simply a rose. When Nick first sees Tom, he describes him accordingly: "Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body–he seemed to fill those glistening boots until he strained the top lacing and you could see a great pack of muscle shifting when his shoulder moved under his thin coat. It was a body capable of enormous leverage–a cruel body" (7). Nick's focalization of Tom's body deserves careful attention. He spends a generous portion of time telling readers about it, as if he is expecting us not to find it odd how intensely he describes how his former classmate's muscles move. In some ways, this could easily be read as jealousy, especially since we assume Nick himself lacks such physicality. However, with jealousy comes desire–Nick's jealousy regarding Tom's masculinity is not just wanting it for himself but unconsciously being attracted to it. Tom's hard nature, in comparison to Nick's sensitivity, is what separates Nick from his family. Nick does not voice the way he feels about Tom–in fact, he rarely says anything remotely positive about Tom. However, when his words are private, Nick is able to indicate his positive feelings towards Tom without fearing judgement. Along this same concept, Judith Butler, a critical theorist, writes that "if part of what desire wants is to gain recognition, then gender, insofar as it is animated by desire, will want recognition as well" (2). Nick's writing acts as a confession–this commentary about Tom indicates a combination of a desire for him and about him which culminates into a distinct ambivalence towards him. Furthermore, the way that Nick presents Tom unconsciously queers him. Tom's reported "effeminate swank" juxtaposed with his "enormous power" exhibits Tom's own gender ambivalence, or at least that Nick is perceiving him with this

quality (7). This ambivalence deepens Nick's queer identity, as he projects his own sexuality and feelings about gender onto Tom, the seeming picture of masculinity.

Furthermore, when describing Jordan Baker, Nick's presumed female love interest for the novel, he tends to ascribe masculine characteristics to her. For example, Nick writes that Jordan was a "slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet" (11). He uses the imagery of a young cadet to describe how he sees her, namely as a young man rather than a woman. This is especially striking because he is discussing her body shape and sexualizing it but accompanying this sexualization with a traditional portrait of masculinity from (at that time) an all-male culture. If we assume Nick is a straight man, the descriptor of a "young cadet" takes readers away from femininity and alters the way we perceive Jordan. Nick would likely want readers to agree that Jordan is attractive but reveals an unconscious desire to frame her physicality in masculine terms. Furthermore, Nick's pursuit of Jordan, alongside the way he perceives her, indicate a subtle subversion of typical heterosexual behavior. Frances Kerr writes, "if what Nick was drawn to in Jordan was masculinity in a woman, what he is drawn to in Gatsby is femininity in a man" (419). If we assume this to be accurate, then Nick consistently seems to fight the gender roles that society attempts to enforce. In other words, he is interested in Jordan because of her boyish characteristics–they fulfill Nick's unconscious attraction to men, while allowing him to perform an apparent commitment to heteronormativity. Despite this relationship with Jordan, Nick's queer desires continue to shine through in his perception of and involvement with other men, and most notably, Gatsby.

The influence of New York as a backdrop for Fitzgerald's works maintains its metaphorical hold on the characters throughout *The Great Gatsby* just as it does in his other works. In this novel, it continues its motif of liberation from social or symbolic constraint. Antolin, regarding New York in Fitzgerald works, writes "it provides the novel with a fundamental referential background and therefore with the necessary verisimilitude. This is the reason why Fitzgerald has sprinkled his text with real place names, street names, and names of restaurants, hotels, and cafes" (114). New York, in Fitzgerald's oeuvre, is a place where, according to Nick, "anything can happen…even Gatsby, without any particular wonder" (69). For many Fitzgerald characters, New York represents a realm of freedom, escape, and even corruption. The first time Nick depicts the city is instigated by Tom, as he is interested in letting Nick meet his mistress, Myrtle.

Tom's involvement with Myrtle – and his reputation for frequent adultery – offers another example of a male character in outright defiance of the sanctity of the institution of marriage. Tom, despite being an important part of the love triangle that will form, never fully subscribes to his marriage. Despite this, Tom treats the presence of his mistress as if it is something commonplace and banal, and in some ways, uses her to boast to Nick about how much of a man he is. In the chapter where Nick meets the mistress, Tom and Myrtle decide to throw a party, invite neighbors (the McKees) and Myrtle's sister, and drink far too much alcohol. Nick confesses that "I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon; so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it" (29). As we have seen in previous Fitzgerald's works, the consumption of alcohol enables subversive behaviors that work against societal norms. The state of intoxication in this scene furthers the idea that these characters are going to

behave in ways that they would likely not otherwise. The first transgression stems from an interaction between Tom and Myrtle. Myrtle, acting outside of Tom's expectations of her, brings up Daisy. This act of defiance against Tom both subverts traditional expectations of femininity and breaks their unspoken rule to keep the two worlds apart. Tom is angered and acts out in response:

> "Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!" shouted Mrs. Wilson. "I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai—"
>
> Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand. (37)

The juxtaposition of Tom's violent actions when he feels he has been slighted in comparison to Nick's quiet resignation further deepens Tom's tendency for toxic masculinity and Nick's subsequent vacillation. In other words, Frances Kerr writes that "masculinity is absolute control over emotional flab…femininity is emotional indulgence or its opposite-enervation" (410). Tom's need to exert his control over those weaker than him fits the bill of masculinity that society has prescribed to him. However, he does subvert the institution of marriage by deliberately separating different aspects of his life and pursuing an extramarital affair. In this regard, Tom possesses a similar cynicism as Anson Hunter in Fitzgerald's novella "The Rich Boy." In contrast to Anson, however, Tom has been able to produce a child and keep a wife; though he fulfills the role traditional masculinity imposes upon him, it is not enough. He feels the need to engage in habits that undermine the institution of marriage.

After the violent encounter between Tom and his mistress, the wild party continues to enable characters to engage in permissive behavior, culminating in a queer

moment between Nick and a man he just met, Mr. McKee. Shortly after the brief fallout of Tom's abusive actions, Mr. McKee and Nick, without a word, leave the party together. Once they are alone in the elevator, Mr. McKee asks Nick if he would like to get lunch together. Nick representation of this entire encounter is interrupted by many elisions, presumably caused by memory lapse from overdrinking, but unlike the narrator of "The Rich Boy," he does not leave much to the imagination:

> "Keep your hands off the lever," snapped the elevator boy.
>
> "I beg your pardon," said Mr. McKee with dignity, "I didn't know I was touching it."
>
> "All right," I agreed, "I'll be glad to."
>
> … I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands. (38)

This scene runs rampant with indicators of queer behavior. For example, the "lever" that the elevator boy snaps at them for can be interpreted as phallic symbol. Tyson writes that these symbols can "include towers, rockets, guns, arrows, swords, and the like. In short, if it stands upright or goes off, it might be functioning as a phallic symbol" (21). If this is agreed to be a phallic symbol, the conversation between Nick and Mr. McKee seems to be some kind of proposal. Of course, some may say that Nick just agrees to lunch and that there is nothing out of the ordinary in this moment, as that is what they were discussing before the interruption made by the elevator boy. However, the quick elision to Mr. McKee in bed, clothed in only his underwear, indicates that something more may have happened between the two. These omissions and symbols, placed early in the novel, introduce the theoretical basis for Nick's queerness. The presence of New York itself also

gives way to anonymity, as Nick never sees this man again nor seems to follow through with the offer of lunch. The ability to be unknown in a foreign place is what gives the change in scenery its narrative power. No matter a character's actions, if they are away from home, it is likely that they will not see anyone they met again unless they seek them out. There is no accountability for their actions.

Furthermore, New York seems to remain in this dreamy haze for Nick, as on the way back to it, he writes, "Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge," I thought; "Anything at all…" Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder" (69). This dreaminess and hope for something could indicate that Nick is remembering his previous queer-leaning experience in New York, and hoping that something similar could or would happen with Gatsby. The way that Nick frames New York as a separate sphere recalls the half-worlds created by Anson in "The Rich Boy." However, unfortunately for Nick, the complete opposite seems to happen with this trip–the tension between Gatsby, Daisy, and Tom proves to be far too much, and every complication between the love triangle seems to claw its way to the surface. Nick's dream and hope for New York does not meet fruition. In fact, the next time he visits New York, everything seems to start crumbling down. The love triangle between Daisy, Gatsby, and Tom reaches a breaking point. Myrtle, Tom's mistress, is hit by a car driven by Daisy and killed. This ambitious hope fails to reach the kind of fruition that Nick seeks.

After Nick formally meets Gatsby, it becomes clear that he will be an important person to Nick, or that at the very least Nick is infatuated with the idea of him. Nick's relationship with Jay Gatsby comes the closest to exhibiting queer romantic love within the Fitzgerald oeuvre. Nick Carraway projects his affections for Gatsby onto Jordan

throughout the entire novel. She acts as a stand-in for what Nick is really seeking: a meaningful relationship with Gatsby. A clue to this lies in Nick's generalized, blasé attitude towards romantic relationships. For example, when deciding to enter a relationship with Jordan, he recalls having another relationship back home. He writes, "but I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires, and I knew that first I had to get myself definitely out of that tangle back home" (59). He is inflating himself to seem like a good person who thinks through his decisions. These other experiences are not detailed to us. Furthermore, for Nick to feel that he has to put brakes on his desires indicates the idea that some of these desires may be taboo. Many of the other characters, namely Tom and Gatsby, do not put brakes on their desires. Tom continues to have an affair right under Daisy's nose. Gatsby bought a large mansion just across from Daisy's home so he could long for her for years on end. Daisy engages in an extra-marital affair with Gatsby and Jordan allegedly cheats in a golf tournament. Why, the reader asks, must Nick put any breaks on his desires if he is a single man, unless those desires are somehow taboo to his culture?

Further along into the novel, just before he brings Gatsby and Daisy back together, Nick finally spends time alone with Jordan. For most of it, he is thinking about Gatsby and Daisy's relationship and the plan to bring the two together. However, he seems to have an epiphany. Nick writes that "suddenly I wasn't thinking of Daisy and Gatsby any more, but of this clean, hard, limited person, who dealt in universal skepticism, and who leaned back jauntily within the circle of my arm" (81). This sudden shift in his thought process seems to arise as the realization that he either needs to act like he enjoys Jordan or figure something else out. Even the way he describes her here—

"jauntily"—seems so wildly unaffectionate and not particularly feminine or desirable. Nick is an exceedingly lyrical person—using these unaffectionate words to describe the woman he is romantically involved with when he dedicates multiple paragraphs to another man's smile reveals a contradiction in his desires and his actions. This ironic distance between a character's words and actions is a common theme in Fitzgerald's oeuvre. A. Wilber Stevens, a Fitzgerald critic, writes that "this divorcement of the intellect from the action, of the peripheral emotion from the internal reality of hard knowledge, is a recusing malady of which certainly Fitzgerald was aware" (103). The deliberate misalignment between the character's thoughts and actions encourages the idea that they are aware that they cannot follow through with all of their desires. This consciousness lends itself to their presence as queer characters. Furthermore, Nick does not encourage the idea that he cares for Jordan very much. Ultimately, Jordan is not only a stand-in for affection he could share with Gatsby, but also a pawn to help Nick fit in with polite society. Having a pretty woman on his arm would dispel any reason for questioning his sexuality. Furthermore, the description of Jordan as a "clean, hard, limited person" is one that conflicts with typical tropes of femininity and plays into the masculine way that Nick thinks of Jordan. It also suggests that Jordan may not have lofty romantic aspirations herself. Ultimately, this relationship fizzles out right after Gatsby's death. This is no coincidence; without Gatsby, and with Daisy and Tom packing their bags, Nick has no reason to continue to perpetuate this idea that he is any kind of interested in a heterosexual affair. Their relationship seems more born out of convenience rather than love or desire.

Despite Nick's involvement with Jordan, he still maintains a constant affection for Gatsby and continues to think very highly of him, despite being given reasons to doubt his character. Though somewhat bittersweet, Gatsby and his cousin Daisy have a history. Gatsby enlists Nick to help bring them together after a long time apart–while Gatsby was serving in the military, Daisy married Tom. This rendezvous was the first time they had seen each other in quite a while. Much of the novel's first half has been building up the tension for this exact moment: the reunion of Daisy and Gatsby. The entire scene is permeated with anxiety, as Gatsby is so fretful about their reunion that he "made his nervous circuit of the house" upon Daisy's arrival (89). He seems to be trying to release some of his anxiety, but he has been waiting for this reunion for so long, spending countless hours staring at the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. Gatsby now appears to be afraid of how the afternoon will unfold. Nick, after sticking his neck out for Gatsby so they can meet again, seems entirely frustrated with his behavior. It is one of the first and only times that Nick shows true annoyance with Gatsby. He says, "You're acting like a little boy…Not only that, but you're rude" (89). Nick is so embarrassed by Gatsby's nerves that he excuses himself outside the first chance he gets. It seems that Nick has an apotheosized version of Gatsby in his head–the way that he is currently acting, especially when it comes to romance, is not one that he expects or endorses. Nick likely encouraged the rekindling of Daisy and Gatsby's relationship because Daisy unconsciously stands in as a proxy for Nick. Nick is overly critical of Gatsby's nerves because he is not living up to the charming, idealized version that Nick is infatuated with and idolizes.

Once he arrives outside, Nick writes "there was nothing to look at from under the tree except Gatsby's enormous house, so I stared at it, like Kant at his church steeple, for

half an hour" (89). Nick proceeds to explain how it was built and the different attributes of the house. It is completely and entirely unrealistic for Gatsby's mansion to be the only thing he wants to think about at this moment, given that Nick is in the process of helping his cousin cheat on her husband with the man whom he finds so fascinating, attractive, and mysterious. Nick's hyper-focus on Gatsby's house could indicate an unconscious need to avoid thinking about what is happening inside his own home. Another element of these purposeful (and in some cases, incidental) omissions of thought lies in the unconscious of these characters. Barry writes that the "unconscious, (is) the part of the mind beyond consciousness which nevertheless has a strong influence upon our actions" (97). Nick's unconscious is heavily influencing his thoughts–he knows that any kind of jealousy that may seep through his words would not bode well for him and decides to omit them through the inspection of Gatsby's house. However, there are many phallic images in this scene–Gatsby's "enormous" house, the tree he's under, the church steeple, and even the half-hour denotes a vertical line. Besides this, he describes his analysis of Gatsby's house as "like Kant at his church steeple," (89). This simile implies a devotion much more intense than just infatuation, it is religious in nature. He presents himself as a worshiper of Gatsby, rather than his equal. Nick may view this religious devotion to be an acceptable way to appreciate Gatsby. Furthermore, William E. Cain writes that "we should ask how much Nick's response is the result of his own desires, hopes, and doubts. He is a reader as much as we are, a reader of Gatsby who is struggling to understand this fabulously rich man who is captivating and mysterious, at once intriguing and absurd" (457). Nick's reading of Gatsby is more than just trying to understand, but instead a deepening desire for intimacy. Nick's scenery keeps him confined to the idea that he

cannot have these thoughts, as his home indicates a structured, specifically heteronormative society that he should not contradict.

When Nick returns to the pair, they are positioned distinctly apart from each other while still maintaining an air of closeness. However, as soon as Nick enters the room, they quickly jump even further apart, with Daisy going over to a mirror to clean up her tear-streaked face. Gatsby then invites the two to his house. Nick is seemingly somewhat reluctant, saying "You're sure you want me to come?" (90). At first, there is nothing too odd about this–Nick is acting as their eyewitness to say no funny business occurred. Nick and Gatsby step outside as Daisy goes to the bathroom to freshen up and clean her face. Nick's hesitation implies that this visit to his house will be more than just a tour, but some kind of sexual foray. Furthermore, as Daisy comes out of Nick's home to join the two, the scene unfolds:

> Before I could answer, Daisy came out of the house and the two rows of brass buttons on her dress gleamed into the sunlight.
>
> "That huge place there?" she cried pointing.
>
> "Do you like it?" (91)

Daisy's comment about the home itself also lends credence to the idea that they are escaping to the other house for "privacy", especially if the house is considered to be a phallic object. Throughout the tour of his home, Gatsby cannot seem to contain his excitement over Daisy's presence. He is described as "running down like an over-wound clock" (93). Again, the clock seems to serve as a distinctly phallic reference. Shortly thereafter, Fitzgerald represents an iconic scene where Gatsby throws his expensive shirts

everywhere. It is the climax of their visit, happening just before they leave Gatsby's private quarters. Nick writes that:

> He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel, which lost their fold as they fell and covered the table in a many-colored disarray. While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue. (93)

The fabric seems to take an almost liquid form, covering the table. This action, alongside all of the phallic references before it, occurs as a kind of ejaculation. Shortly after, Daisy cannot help but cry, because she has "never seen such beautiful shirts before" (94). The entire visit is littered with innuendo. This is likely because the chances of Daisy and Gatsby experiencing physical intimacy are slim to none. She lives with her husband, and Gatsby was already feeling embarrassed about asking Nick to arrange this meeting. His social convictions would likely withhold him from asking for something so scandalous. However, to participate in a loosely veiled threesome would do just fine. Nick, wishing to be Daisy's proxy the entire time, likely does not mind this turn of events. In fact, this moment likely feeds into the idealized and romanticized version of Gatsby he has in his mind. Additionally, the distinctive colors of Gatsby's shirts further feminize him, making his style seem queer to a traditional masculine aesthetic. The emphasis on flamboyant styles and pastel colors and the sheer amount of shirts Gatsby owns show that he has strong feelings about the way he is presented and how people perceive him.

Furthermore, Gatsby's mansion is known as a place full of promiscuity, scandal, and debauchery—the parties he hosts, and his own business dealings emphasize this fact. It is as if his home creates this permissive world for the three to engage in transgressive behavior, similar to how Tom has an apartment in New York where he takes Myrtle. Nick, as the narrator of this novel, manages to write an entire manuscript on his involvement with a fantastical man and the struggles of modern life. There are several instances in this novel when Nick elaborates on his infatuation with Gatsby–how Gatsby made him feel, how his and Gatsby's relationship was so special. For example, on Gatsby's smile, Nick writes:

> He smiled understandingly–much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced–or seemed to face–the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. (48)

In some editions of this novel, this monologue about his smile takes up a significant portion of the page. He spends much less time on Jordan, his romantic interest, or on Daisy, who is purported to be the female romantic lead in the novel. If this were any other novel, and Gatsby were a woman, many readers would likely take this moment as that initial spark–a moment of love at first sight. The storyline of *The Great Gatsby* is limited by many things, including the time in which it was published and the stifling culture that even fictional Nick Carraway is bound to. Even when Nick discovers that Gatsby has lied about his identity, Nick not only accepts the deceit but contrives a way to idolize it. Nick writes:

> The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God — a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that — and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. (73)

Here, Nick literally equates Gatsby to Jesus. Nick worships Gatsby's house like it is a steeple. Nick is so infatuated with the image of Gatsby that he has created, that despite some of it being false, he continues to believe in and worship him like it is his religion. Nick does not experience this same kind of devotion to Jordan, his cousin Daisy, or anyone else in the novel. He seems to feel nowhere near the same amount of passion for Jordan, for example, admitting, "I wasn't actually in love, but I felt some sort of tender curiosity" (50). Overall, it is more often than not that throughout the text, Nick is saying something positive about a male character rather than something positive about a female character. His tendency to emphasize his affection towards other men and accept his affection towards women indicates a cynicism towards the idea of heterosexuality. This phenomenon persists in Fitzgerald's work and seems to culminate into nearly every heteronormative relationship falling apart by the end of each work. Nick and Jordan are not the only couple prone to this in Fitzgerald's writing –Dick and Nicole Diver, Anson and Paula, and of course Daisy and Gatsby (though Tom and Daisy seem to persist despite their dysfunctionality).

Nick experiences a deep love for Gatsby that makes their relationship the most meaningful and substantive one in the novel. The last conversation the two have before Gatsby's subsequent murder is exceedingly somber. Gatsby has lost contact with Daisy, as the two have packed up and left the area quickly after Myrtle's gruesome murder.

Gatsby carries an air of distinct sadness, even lamenting over the fact that he had not used the pool all summer. Nick's last words to Gatsby carry weight:

> "They're a rotten crowd," I shouted across the lawn. "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together."
>
> I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. (154)

This claim of disapproving of him from beginning to end is blatantly untrue and a half-baked effort to reinstate himself into the norms of polite society. Nick, throughout the entire work, worshiped Gatsby, even after learning about his lies and unsavory past. Everything that motivated Nick throughout the entire novel was, in some way, related to Gatsby. This statement, in its unconvincing manner, is purposeful. It reminds readers that Nick, who claims to be "one of the few honest people that [he] has ever known," is in fact a deeply unreliable narrator (60). He has avoided the complete truth for the entire novel. Nick's avoidance furthers the idea of Nick as a queer character–unfortunately, when in the closet, one frequently finds themselves lying or telling mistruths. Sedgwick writes that being in the closet is "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence–not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts" (3). Nick's occasional transparency with his feelings towards Gatsby is a clear example of this–his choices to redact some elements of his work, and his allusions to himself being less than truthful with what he is saying are clear elements of this closeted-ness.

When reflecting on Gatsby's final moments, Nick writes:

> He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. (162)

Nick's commentary about roses, again, is purposeful, recalling Daisy's comparison of him to the flower towards the beginning of the novel. In some ways, this quotation is more about Nick's guilt than anything– if he had not moved to West Egg, if he had not brought Gatsby and Daisy together again, and if he had not facilitated their love affair, then Gatsby might still be alive. He was the interloper. Nick sparked the chain of events, and without him, Gatsby could have gone on, blissfully watching the green light at the end of the dock. Nick's infatuation with Gatsby, his urge to give him whatever he wanted, is what ultimately led to his demise. Nick's devotion to a love that would never come to fruition is the true tragedy of the novel, far more than the hollow and merely sentimental relationship between Gatsby and Daisy.

However, the heterosexual relationship is what takes up most of the literary criticism regarding *The Great Gatsby*—if not focusing on heterosexuality, critics tend to focus on money, history, the American dream. In the American literary canon, Fitzgerald's "sad young men" have been oversimplified as tragic men whose romantic relationships inevitably failed. My work argues that there is more to this persistent failure—these men should be given the room to breathe as characters who experience sexuality in a nonnormative way. Sedgwick writes that "even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important" (68). The silence around sexuality, and in some

cases the grudging performance of it, solidifies many of these Fitzgerald characters as embodying these queer motifs. The division of different sectors of their life and outright refusal of bringing these separate worlds together is a tactic queer people used to conceal their sexualities, as are the apparent involvement in marriages and heterosexual courtships, and the scramble to seem too busy or otherwise self-destructive to participate in heterosexual institutions. Fitzgerald's characters have rarely been analyzed through the lens of queer theory, overall due to the political and social climate in which they were published. Academic critiques of literature in the past were largely white, masculine, and most importantly straight. To assert deviance from heterosexuality was seen as deeply taboo. Thankfully, in these modern times, these characters now have the opportunity to step out of the stuffy closet they were trapped in by their author and audience. Recognizing these queer behaviors in Fitzgerald's works specifically points to an important idea—queer people have always been around, and their place in history is one that should be recognized and upheld. The inclusion of these characters deepens Fitzgerald's presence as an important American author and showcases how he can be seen as newly relevant to contemporary readers. He represents more than dramatic, wistful, vignettes of the 1920s Jazz Age. His fiction subtly exhibits the complexity of American life, including the lives of people whose history is often erased or downplayed.

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