

“The Outside Story: ‘The Great Gatsby’ as Journalism”

Paul F. Braun, University of Florida

This research ties together references inside F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby” with its outside-era’s real world. ““The Great Gatsby” as Journalism” advances academic knowledge through discovering new associations and links between the novel and its time, derived methodologically from hundreds of hours of reeling through newspaper microfilms, blowing the dust off aged periodicals, and digesting era-sensitive books. Drawing little interest at the time of its publication in 1925, the novel rose to iconic prominence among canons of Western culture, history, literature, and film. The delay may have been due to an overlooked feature of the book: Fitzgerald drew so heavily from current events found in journalism that the novel might have blended too easily into the fabric of everyday life in the 1920s to justify reading it.

It seems “The Great Gatsby”’s popularity increased as daily acquaintance of social and historical experiences faded from its early-public’s memory. As time went along, author and novel inspired theoretical analysis and debate. For mid-twentieth century teachers, the novel epitomized the critical theory New Criticism. Today, as in the case of this research, the novel lends itself to a newer form of literary theory and cultural-historical study, New Historicism.

Most readers of “The Great Gatsby” would not automatically set the story during the 1920s.

It feels as if what is happening inside the novel occurred only yesterday not nearly a century ago. Even discerning readers might overlook connections of timelines inside the novel with timelines outside the novel – a triangle of moments in time between the novel’s date of authorship, the plot unfolding amid momentous flows of liquor, and the era of Prohibition.

Literary scholars connect the novel's aura and staying power with details represented from the culture of its time, yet, ironically, point out that its timelessness relies on its shroud of vagueness and mystery. Despite enumerable allusions in the novel to time, there is, in fact, just one direct reference: a train schedule. If skimmed over, the novel's circumstances, characters, and plot could easily be in today's newspapers. Regardless of Fitzgerald's intentions, "The Great Gatsby" presents a believable image of something beyond its own era, something out of its time. Yet, Fitzgerald drew on events happening around him in real life, revealing the reason scholars point to the novel as an historical piece portraying life in 1920's America.

"The Great Gatsby' as Journalism" briefly considers Fitzgerald's use of first person narration in the novel. Even today, the voice, sounding so nearby in the text, breathes familiarity through its allusions and references to a superabundance of real-world events, people, products and printed materials from the 1920s—thus providing for investigation a nearly bottomless well of resources to add to the corpus of cultural and historical study surrounding this novel. Oftentimes understanding references to an era depends not only on what the author explicitly states, but also upon what the author ignores. In contrast to the novel's allusions and references to contemporary people, places and events, conspicuously absent are notoriously notable fixtures of the era such as President William G. Harding and perennial-presidential-hopeful, William Randolph Hearst.

An extensive review of coeval news accounts reveals embedded in "The Great Gatsby" subtle journalistic references that create the verisimilitude that contributes to its aura and popularity today. Drawing into the discussion existing scholarly research and study, "The Great Gatsby" as Journalism expands academic insight by connecting newly found links from inside the novel to the outside world.

Today, "The Great Gatsby" provides an opportunity to seek real-world occurrences where directly and off-handedly the novel linked itself to its time. Through the voice of Nick Carraway a first-person narrator the story openly involves actual people, places, and events entwined in a make-believe tale about a society struggling to make sense of itself in post-World War I. A sense of reclaiming a quasi-wholesome time of

innocence, if ever there were one, within the harsh reality of the current time proved entrenched in change. Feeling close and cozy with the narrator, as is the nature with first-person, readers associate, if not completely substitute, the fictional character's voice for the author's voice. Readers of any era intuitively give unearned credibility to Nick Carraway's story despite he is in reality a fallible, fictional character produced from Fitzgerald's imagination.

Scholars attribute "The Great Gatsby"'s staying power and appealing aura to its mythical nature. Stephen Matterson claims the ingredient behind creating myth is that the subject and characters should be timeless, always pointing toward the universal, and not limited in anyway to anything so specific as time and place (2). Shrouded in vagueness and mystery the novel nearly a century old embodies American culture as if the setting and storyline were from today (Bicknell 556, Brucoli 6-7).

But an important relationship exists between the historical information occurring inside the story of "The Great Gatsby" and the novel's actual period outside. The novel's narrative style depends strongly on understanding the interaction between the two, for the first person narrator's voice is, indeed, like his author's, inseparable, and a product of his time – the 1920s. Brian Way posits in "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction" that "the War had made people tired of great causes" (12). Fitzgerald wrapped up the early 1920s as an era when people were "cynical rather than revolutionary, even the corruption of President Harding's administration could only arouse a momentary concern once this attitude had established itself" (qtd. in Way 12).

Published in 1925, "The Great Gatsby" was not a brisk mover. It sold fewer than 25,000 copies and received mixed reviews (Gross xi). Not only did "The Great Gatsby" hold forth little for readers during its time, but in the early 1930s, The Modern Library, which gambled on a printing, eventually chose to cancel its run because of low-to-no public interest. Was that not telling enough, "When Fitzgerald died in 1940, the chances of Gatsby's survival might well have seemed slim" (Tredell 7).

Often an artist's stock rises after he dies, and so is the case with Fitzgerald's. In 1941, Scribner's published a volume of Fitzgerald's popular short stories along with his unfinished novel "The Love of the Last Tycoon" and, inexplicably, included "The Great Gatsby", owing perhaps to

its small number of pages as to its comparability to “Tycoon”. This time reviews of “The Great Gatsby” were not mixed. For instance, Clifton Fadiman wrote that “The Great Gatsby” was “unexpectedly readable” (qtd. in Bryer 369). James Gray wrote the novel was a “beautifully articulated piece of craftsmanship” (qtd. in Bryer 358), and Margaret Marshall wrote, “Fitzgerald reached that plateau of objectivity and control in fiction which few American novelists attain” (qtd. in Bryer 364).

Scribner’s began reprinting “The Great Gatsby” with other works of Fitzgerald to unprecedented demand. Printing-rights also extended to other publishers such as Viking and Bantam, which included in 1941 an “Armed Services edition in which alone were printed 155,000 copies that were given away free to military personnel” (Tredell 42).

Venturing within “The Great Gatsby” as if with guidebook in hand, the novel’s era proves remarkably interesting. The road to travel needs as markers only for the researcher to ask, “What would readers of the 1920s known intuitively about the affairs spoken of by Nick?” The answers help to add to the corpus of existing cultural history of the 1920s.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

There exists today research to aid readers in understanding broadly significant goings-on outside the novel, but only a few works delve into specific details. To the extent that it seems almost every page of Fitzgerald’s novel touches upon something familiar about its era for readers of the 1920s, the task and potential for bringing forward details and adding them to the current discussion is all but endless.

Few if anyone is alive today as primary sources to turn and ask firsthand to fill in blanks for clarifying direct or indirect references in the novel. Accounting for the fact that the setting is 1922 – eighty-two years ago – any living sources who would have interacted as adults in that society would be more than one-hundred-years old today. Alternatively, however, books, newspapers, and periodicals from that era remain frozen in time.

That Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby” provides for academicians a window through time to the “flapper-era” of the early 1920s is a theme developed to nearly mammoth proportions, writes Nicolas Tredell in “The Critical Guide, F. Scott

Fitzgerald, 'The Great Gatsby'" (5). Culturally oriented discussions concerning "The Great Gatsby" must depend on facts from the past; because of its very existence the novel is historical, published nearly a century ago. In an effort to contribute something original to the discussion of "The Great Gatsby", this work aims to uncover from the novel fresh cultural and historical insight from direct and indirect references.

The theoretical perspective informing this research finds basis in "New Historicism," which invites research about subjects and topics outside novels themselves (Richter 1204, 1207). John Brannigan in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* contends, "For new historicism and cultural materialism the object of study is not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature in history (4). From Kenneth Johnston, English professor at Indiana University, "The study of a literary work is larger than its text" (qtd. in Baude 8). Adding to Johnston's comments, Dror Wahrman, history professor at Indiana contends, "The boundaries are breaking down – historians look to see how a population imagined what was going on during its era" (qtd. in Baud 9). A novel is certainly representative of an imaginary means by which both author and reader view the culture during a given era.

History, as historians are well aware, is largely fictional; it is at the same time both accurate and flawed, depending on the viewpoint. "To the victor go the spoils," has always included writing history. New Historians argue that the past never needs to be re-written; rather, it needs added onto. The rationale is that even blatant lies that might have found their way into gospel did so in reflection of an ideology or culture about the era from which it was generated (Richter 1207). Under the umbrella of New Historicism, there is no end to the possibilities behind applying biographical facts about F. Scott Fitzgerald to his novel "The Great Gatsby", and applying real world events to the novel itself. But, in each instance, for ties to bind, logical connections must exist or else risk dismissal, which is to say that loose connections prove no better than flimsy allusions.

There are extant contributions already covering historical and cultural curiosities within "The Great Gatsby". Tribute must be given to seminal pieces such as to Ronald Berman's "'The Great Gatsby' and Modern Times"; Dalton Gross and Mary Jean Gross's "Understanding 'The Great Gatsby'"; Stephen Matterson's "'The Great Gatsby' – The Critics Debate"; and, Katie de Koster (ed.), "Readings on

‘The Great Gatsby’’. Each of these works detail instances of historical facts and cultural events of the 1920s in “The Great Gatsby”, and, in some cases, biographical links between Fitzgerald and his text.

It is not the purpose here to repeat developed analyses, comparisons, and interpretations. For example, those surrounding well-known developed topics and insights such as the locale of East and West Egg in relation to Long Island, New York, or references to the rigged World Series of 1919, this, in the real world, involved someone like Meyer Wolfsheim, a character in “The Great Gatsby”. Rather, following are fresh possibilities – qualitative research implemented in the vein of new historicism, answering cultural curiosities that concern the era and raise the potential for greater study.

THE INSIDE STORY:

A brief summary of the plot and setting of “The Great Gatsby” should suffice to help readers with fuzzy-memories and non-readers alike toward appreciating the cultural underpinnings from the 1920s for the story within the novel. Nick Carraway, the novel’s main character, describes going to New York from his home in Minnesota to become a bond salesman in 1922. He tells his story in hindsight a year or so after returning home, setting the stage for relating it within a two-year period, 1923 - 1924. The novel is not overly clear regarding timeframes, but piecing together tidbits from Nick’s narrative the window of his story opens as June through October 1922. It is worth pausing to note that in the real world Fitzgerald’s first and only print within the era itself of “The Great Gatsby” was dated 1925.

Briefly, the story unfolds where Nick, as chance would have it, lived in a low-rent cottage next door to Jay Gatsby’s nouveau riche monstrous mansion in a rapidly developed community set on Long Island Sound. Gatsby’s real name is James Gatz. James Gatz, of North Dakota, began calling himself Jay Gatsby as a teenager because it sounded to him as if it could be more successful. Like Nick, Gatsby had been in the “Great War,” which, in the story, as in the real world, would of course not yet have been known as World War I.

Gatsby was a bootlegger, but he did not drink. He grew up a poor boy but championed and proved himself a self-made man during Prohibition, settling-up and buying-off the right people to become wealthy. Locally, Gatsby was famous for his summertime lawn parties where booze flowed freely and drew splendid

crowds.

Besides Nick and Gatsby, the other two main characters are Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Daisy is Nick's cousin. She originally came from Louisville, born of a comfortable family. Tom Buchanan, Daisy's husband, hailed of blue-blooded money. Tom Buchanan was not in the War. He met Daisy, a debutant, during his college fraternity days at Yale around 1917 - 1918. Before the War in 1916, Gatsby, 27, met and fell in love with Daisy, 18, while temporarily stationed in Louisville. Gatsby and Daisy corresponded for a short while after he shipped overseas. Eventually, however, Daisy traded up, easing into a relationship with Tom that she thought erased Gatsby from her life.

In the story, married and living comfortably, Daisy and Tom live across the Sound from Gatsby.

Daisy is unaware that Gatsby lives there, though she comes to the startling realization when Nick, early in the novel, drops over to dine with her and Tom and asks if they know anything about this man. Tom, besides being clueless about Gatsby, whatsoever, is, also, due to the size of his own ego, completely blind to any idea that involves Daisy's younger years short of simply waiting for him.

At night, Gatsby would stand on his dock and stare across to Tom and Daisy's blue-blooded side of the Sound, where stood deep-rooted old-money mansions. Gatsby focused far away on a green light at the end of their dock. Nick introduces Gatsby standing on his dock, smoking a cigarette, staring off into the night. Nick and Gatsby become friends. In due course, Tom and Daisy Buchanan attend one of Gatsby's lawn parties. Ultimately, a romance rekindles between Gatsby and Daisy. Tom has a mistress, an impoverished married woman living on Gatsby's side of the Sound that counts on Tom to lift her from low station.

Finally, Gatsby, Tom and Daisy have a showdown at a small party in the Plaza Hotel in New

York where they convened for an evening in the city. And the plot begins accelerating rapidly. To get to that evening's small gathering they drive separate cars. Tom, by happenstance, drove Gatsby's flashy car. The road he took led him past his mistress's place. Mistress-Myrtle simply eyes Tom at the wheel driving this car (store that information, because it is very important). The gathering at the Plaza ends abruptly with Gatsby, stunned to learn that in spite of the renewed romance with Daisy, he does not measure up and she will not leave Tom for him. Tom, learning only then

about their affair, mocks Gatsby. The party breaks up. Tom, feeling triumphantly superior, sends Daisy to drive home alone with Gatsby in Gatsby's car. Daisy takes the wheel. Gatsby asks her to because he feels it will steady her nerves. Tom's mistress recognizes the car and assumes Tom has come back for her. Daisy is driving at nearly full throttle. Myrtle runs into the road; Daisy hits her and kills her and drives off. Mistress-Myrtle's husband wants to know who owned the car that hit her, assuming that would have been the driver. Tom Buchanan points him at Gatsby. The husband tracks down Gatsby at his home: husband shoots and kills Gatsby. Only three people attend Gatsby's funeral: Nick, Gatsby's father and a perennial attendee of Gatsby's lawn parties, despite the hundreds of blue-blooded and nouveau riche hangers-on that had graced Gatsby's summertime parties and behaved toward him as friends. Nick concludes in the final few paragraphs of the story, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (158).

OUTSIDE THE STORY:

A reference bearing little meaning within the novel but begs a deeper look outside occurs from Nick, himself, in the suite at the Plaza Hotel at the occasion of the showdown where Tom faces off Gatsby. Nick replies to Tom during the evening that he does not want another drink of whisky. Then, as an afterthought, Nick mulls aloud, "I just remembered that today's my birthday." Going on to reflect privately over this comment himself and speaking to nobody but the reading audience, Nick, as the narrator, adds, "I was thirty. Before me stretched the portentous, menacing road of a new decade" (120). Deducing in chronological time inside the novel Nick's strange observation of his birthday, situates the date in mid-September. Evidence that establishes the approximate date arises threefold as Nick relates this as the day Daisy kills Myrtle (Tom's mistress) in her hit and run accident later that evening. Afterward, that night, Nick goes over to Tom and Daisy's home and instead of interrupting their intense conversation watches them through their pantry window. He describes his own movement, "crossing the porch where we had dined that June night three months before [*italics added*], I came to a small rectangle of light which I guessed was the pantry window" (128). Also, further cementing September as the month, Nick narrates Gatsby's father's arrival for his

son's funeral – four days after the hit and run accident: "A solemn old man, very helpless and dismayed, bundled up in a long cheap ulster against the warm September day" (147). The point is, and perhaps it is just a coincidence, but Nick's birthday nearly matches Fitzgerald's precisely; September 24, 1896, possibly narrowing the gap between Nick Carraway, narrator, and Fitzgerald, author.

The most casual reader of "The Great Gatsby" cannot help noticing Nick's extensive reference outside the novel to other publications of the era, such as newspapers, magazines, and books. Yet one reference in particular seems to have fallen through the cracks; owing, perhaps, to the fact "The Great Gatsby" did not create a large enough splash in its own time to have evoked analysis. Whereby, the reference might have drawn critical attention and subsequent staying power for what the reference really is. Or, in its time, the implication was so evident it needed no explanation. Later, when insight about it might have enriched reading, its nonchalant reference inside the novel passes virtually assumed in the obviousness of its title, taking on prima facie meaning: "Simon Called Peter", suggesting obviously a pious, religious work (30). Especially considering where it is included in "The Great Gatsby", referencing the novel "Simon Called Peter" and its religious overtone easily fits to reinforce Nick's reaction to the inappropriate setting in which he finds himself. But a deeper look reveals something entirely different.

Chronologically deducing the date inside the novel as July 2, 1922, Nick joins Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson (Tom's mistress) for a drink at their love-nest apartment in New York. No doubt, the reference, "Simon Called Peter" – a good religious read – proves at odds with the circumstance, as he reflects, "I sat down discreetly in the living-room and read a chapter [of the novel] "Simon Called Peter" – either it was terrible stuff or the whiskey distorted things, because it didn't make any sense to me" (30). That is all the reference there is to the novel – no more than one sentence.

Research reveals there is more going on here than meets the eye. Robert Keable (1887-1927) wrote "Simon Called Peter", and its first print-run was September 1921. By August 1922, roughly around the time Nick is supposedly reading a chapter from it in "The Great Gatsby", Keable's novel was undergoing its thirty-fifth printing – that's right, thirty-five – and by the end of 1923, the novel had reached an impressive eighty-three printings (Keable), and,

by 1925, hit a zenith of nearly one hundred. In the early 1920s, Keable's novel was considered the raciest book of the ages, even drawing a fine of \$100 from a judge levied against a woman for circulating it as obscene ("Boston Judge"). The novel is about a priest who volunteers to serve in WW I, hoping to keep troops on the straight and narrow path. In sum, however, the adage that applies best for how this priest, Peter, practiced his craft was, while in Rome, do as the Romans do. We know what Nick thought about Keable's work, but let's see what a New York Times' reviewer had to say:

More and more [Peter] came to feel himself "out of touch with men and life." Presently he wrote Hilda [his fiancée back in the states] that he was going "to eat and drink with publicans and sinners: maybe I shall find my Master still there." But long before that letter was written Peter had a very considerable acquaintance among sinners. A long procession of women of the street files across these pages. He is inclined to blame not the creed in which he still firmly believes, but the way in which he has been taught and the times. The novel is very well written, in a clear and vigorous style. ("Simon Called Peter")

Interesting facts about Keable's novel do not stop there. Keable, in fact, was a priest ("Robert Keable"), and his novel came to take on genuine meaning especially outside the pages of fiction, precisely at the time when Nick draws his conclusion in "The Great Gatsby". Let's see what else the "New York Times" reported about Keable's novel on October 20, 1922, noting, among other important things that it "was the object of a complaint several months earlier by Secretary John S. Sumner of the Society for the Suppression of Vice" ("Sumner"):

Mr. Sumner asserted that it was a highly insidious book, because, published with a title savoring of religion and written by a clergyman, it had an innocent look which admitted it to society where the ordinary licentious novel could not circulate. Mr. Sumner denounced the book before the Catholic Club and elsewhere. Because of the easy stages by which the book progressed to its striking passages, it was an ideal weapon, according to Mr. Sumner, for accelerating an intrigue. ("Sumner")

Accelerating an intrigue? – Oh, did it ever. For the majority of the rest of the "New York Times" story refers to a landmark incident in New Jersey that occurred September 16, 1922. There, and then, "Simon Called Peter" just as well could have been among love letters written by the prominent-married Rev. Edward

Wheeler Hall. A clergyman, who, on that date, neighbors found lying next to one of his church choir members likewise neatly laid-out under a crabapple tree, at the end of a deserted road, where lovers went – murdered (“Rector and Woman”).

Skipping the macabre details reported again, and again, in the press, Keable’s novel played prominently into these court stories. The true story from that time is that Reverend Edward Wheeler Hall, it turns out, had evidently given “this spicy book” to Mrs. Eleanor Reinhardt Mills, wife of the church gardener. From love letters scattered around their bodies, Mrs. Mills referred to how Keable’s book had “fired my soul” (“Rector Hall”). Despite two trials, reported at length in the press spanning September 1922 through late 1927, the outcomes from the trials resulted in no convictions.

To this day, the murders remain unsolved. Yet, to appreciate fully in the public eye how sensational both the murders and the trials were, we need only consider the quantity of entries found in “The New York Times Index”. In 1922, September 17 to December 31, there were 213 stories – on average, in the New York Times alone, nearly four a day. The evening of the murders in the real world corresponds almost perfectly to the evening in “The Great Gatsby” when Daisy runs over and kills Myrtle, Tom’s mistress.

Neither the curiosity in the murders nor the reference to Keable’s book waned in the ensuing two years, 1923 and 1924 (“Times Indexes”). Notably, in “The Great Gatsby”, Nick as a character in the novel is now home in Minneapolis writing his own account of Tom, Myrtle, Gatsby, and Daisy (Fitzgerald 8). Throughout 1923 and 1924, the Hall-Mills murders – as the affair came to be known – were fueled by the victims’ bodies being exhumed; a booze-hound private investigator leaking clues to the press; an appeal to the governor by Hall’s widow insisting that the press leave her and her two brothers alone (who were tried for the murders and acquitted); and, involvement, if not ultimately where guilt might rest, with the Ku Klux Klan (Kunstler). In “The Great Gatsby”, the mention of Keable’s novel “Simon Called Peter” would have most certainly inspired familiarity, linking the goings-on inside the novel with the outside real world.

Another example within “The Great Gatsby” that seems to invite closer examination also comes from the same setting. At their love-nest apartment with Tom and Tom’s mistress, Nick claims to have gotten drunk; drunk, he says, for only the

second time in his life, “so everything that happened has a dim, hazy cast over it”(30). As the evening and nighttime finally give way to early in the morning, Nick decides to find his own way home. By deduction, it is Monday, July 3, 1922. Nick refers to himself as “lying half asleep in the cold lower level of the Pennsylvania Station, staring at the morning Tribune, and waiting for the four o’clock train” (38).

A microfilm copy of the front page of the “New York Tribune” reveals some interesting goings-on that day. Noteworthy, at the outset, is that the Tribune’s banner reads, “First to last—the Truth.” Below that in the center and above the fold is a story about Canada’s only female parliament member, Miss Agnes MacPhail who had intended to set an example to other members:

Miss Agnes MacPhail, the only woman member of the Canadian Parliament, has returned to Minister of Finance Fielding \$1,500 of the \$4,000 paid her as “sessional indemnity,” or salary as Parliamentarian. “I can use the money,” Miss MacPhail explained in a letter to the Minister. “Anybody can use \$4,000. But I object to the increase of the indemnity from \$2,500 to \$4,000 at a time when our men were overseas and the cry was economy. There is no use preaching economy unless we give the people a lead in economy.” (“Returns”)

To the right of the article of Miss MacPhail’s gracious gesture that Nick’s eyes would have likely fallen next are two more stories. Both tucked beneath nearly headline-size print, “450,000 More May Get Rail Strike Call To-day” (“Rail Strike”), and the other, “Joyous Crowds Hail Harding Auto Caravan” (“Joyous”). What are worth examining in closer detail are contrasts of colossal proportions. Hence:

BLUE-BLOODERS, BOOZERS AND PRESIDENT WILLIAM G. HARDING:

Once I wrote down on the empty spaces of a timetable the names of those who came to Gatsby’s house that summer. It is an old timetable now, disintegrating at its folds, and headed “This schedule in effect July 5th, 1922.” (Fitzgerald 57)

This date of July 5, 1922, is the only specific one referred to by Nick in the novel. “The New York Tribune” of July 3, in the real world, reported a railroad strike that would affect him, mentioning, as it did, a new train schedule in effect July 5, 1922. There also exists the possibility that Fitzgerald did not randomly choose “July 5th, 1922,” as his sole, only, and specific date to reference. Following this hunch like an investigative

reporter through the microfilms of “The New York Times”, an unexpected and enlightening correlation emerged.

To what would have Nick been treated had he read “The New York Times” on that specific

Wednesday, July 5, 1922 – let’s say, for example, on his train ride into work? On the front page, first column, is none other than a real life story about one of history’s best (or worst) living examples of duplicity, skullduggery, graft, and ironic tragedy of the early 1920s. There, and in four more full columns on page ten, is President William G. Harding’s Fourth of July day speech, verbatim. In terms of what Harding’s speech would mean to readers of the novel of “The Great Gatsby” in its own era bears a closer look to see what Hardy himself had to say about the times.

Harding delivered his speech in Marion, Ohio, his hometown, where he claimed to arrive as a youngster on the back of a mule and now returns in a limousine as the President of the United States. For readers of the early twenties, if it seemed Fitzgerald’s fictional character Jay Gatsby had been touched temporarily by the “Horatio Alger” wand (Geck), then, in real life, it must have seemed William G. Harding had been clubbed by it. At this juncture, before getting into the contents of Harding’s speech (which from a socioeconomic view overlays “The Great Gatsby” nicely), let us pause for a moment and reflect on what historians consider important to remember about Harding. From “The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia” (quoted here for the maximum effect of what general and obvious information there is available about Harding), comes the following. Harding was “elected on a Republican platform [of which he and it were handpicked] from what would soon become known as the ‘smoked filled room.’” His platform was “one pledging a nostalgic ‘return to normalcy’ following World War I; [however,] widespread corruption permeated his loosely run administration, [and] he died unexpectedly [if not mysteriously] during his third year in office [August 2, 1923]” (“Harding”).

A notably relevant fact relating Harding with respect to “The Great Gatsby” is that although Harding was dead when Scribner’s published the novel in 1925, Harding was quite alive during the summer of 1922. Also, that summer of 1922, Harding was fending off charges over “favoritism” lavished on “cronies,” such as “the oil Reserves, or Teapot Dome Scandal, in which federal oil reserves had been secretly leased by Secretary of the Interior, Albert B. Fall, to [Harding’s] associates in the business world” (“Harding”). It is against this backdrop of real world historical events

and corruptions that we have in play Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby".

Sparse as they were, actual reviews from the era of the twenties agree with Fitzgerald's realistic and timely depictions. For instance, "The Great Gatsby" represents "one phase of the great grotesque spectacle of our American scene," reads the book review in "The New York Times" on April 19, 1925 (Clark). Furthermore, the review continues, "The Great Gatsby" demonstrates "a conflict of spirituality caught fast in the web of our commercial life [and] discloses in people a meanness of spirit, carelessness and absence of loyalties." William Rose Benet for the "Saturday Review" called "The Great Gatsby" "an admirable novel," in which "Fitzgerald surveys the Babylonian captivity of this era unblinded by the bright lights," and, about Tom Buchanan, the review says, "he is an American university product of almost unbearable reality" (739).

Conspicuously absent, yet so otherwise front page newsworthy in the real world in 1922,

William G. Harding's name is never mentioned in "The Great Gatsby". In Harding's July Fourth speech, he glorifies himself for still being an ordinary countryman just returning to his roots in Ohio. From his July Fourth speech, "The New York Times" cites Harding then for the first time ever during his administration to "refer publicly to the prohibition amendment": Harding defends it. For a man representing a philosophical platform that seeks a "return to normalcy," Harding characterizes the amendment in an uncommon and ironic way:

"The Eighteenth Amendment," said the President, "denies to a minority a fancied sense of personal liberty, but the amendment is the will of America and must be sustained by the Government and public opinion, else contempt for the law will undermine our very foundation." ("Harding Declares")

Perhaps the most interesting fact to note about his remark is that should "public opinion" fail in contributing to "sustain" the amendment, then, the bedrock of the American system could crumble. Ironically, Harding himself was a boozier, memorialized for it, no less, than by another Ohioan, James Wright, a Pulitzer Prize winning poet, in 1972 (Wright, 119 – 121; "Wright"). As far as illustrating public opinion, "The Great Gatsby", a transparency of the era itself, ebbs and flows liquor among each one of the characters with unabashed freedom, as if in the real world the amendment never existed. That is, to say, emphatically, it does among all of the characters except

for Jay Gatsby. He doesn't drink from rational choice, but he is a capitalist and the supplier on behalf of all those who do.

Compounding the irony behind Harding's personal declaration in his speech is the added mention that distances himself – "the White House" – from his Secretary of War's "recently declared [support] for the sale of light wines and beer" ("Harding Declares"). In reality, no amendment could have been further away from the beaten path of the majority – a majority that Harding insultingly characterizes as undertaking "a fancied personal liberty."

Segueing from his passionate remarks on the subject of Prohibition, Harding smoothly moves into a warning about ensuring "the right to work and live by that work" ("Harding Declares"). This, ironically enough, understates "the mining massacre at Herrin, Ill," occurring June 22, 1922 (Angle, 3). This also is a key date in the novel "The Great Gatsby", arrived at by deduction. Nick, Tom and Daisy wonder aloud that evening – the equinox, first day of summer, and longest day of the year – what they ought to be doing (16). Outside the novel, that evening, armed striking coal union laborers ushered working non-union miners away from the mines, and, once in the open, told them to run: then they opened fire, killing more than 20. Amidst incredibly conflicting accounts of the incident, this ugly chapter in American history played itself to the conclusion where there were no convictions, despite 214 indictments issued quickly after the slaughter (Angle, 1-8).

In Harding's speech of July 4, 1922, is a reproach aimed at those linking exaggerated and even outright made-up things linked to patriotic facts: My one outstanding conviction, after sixteen months in the Presidency, is that the greatest traitor to his country is he who appeals to prejudice and inflames passion, when sober judgment and honest speech are so necessary to firmly established tranquility and security.

Although Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" would not fall at first blush into Harding's definition of "treasonous," the work nevertheless fits the paradox. "The Great Gatsby" clearly illustrates the antithesis of "Americanization," or the death of the "American Dream," considering Gatsby is shot and killed, compared to the Horatio Alger phenomenon where "poor boy makes good" (Geck). Applying Harding's logic of what makes for good citizenship, "The Great Gatsby" unmistakably illustrates ironic examples where unbridled corruption yields

good profits at the expense of disfiguring names of blue-blooders and depicting the working class as barely better than walking dead, such as the case with the husband of Tom's mistress who kills Gatsby. Ironically, Gatsby, a living example of the American Dream – ambitious, a man of few words and the most likeable character in the novel – is last seen physically stretched out in the drawing room of his magnificently grotesque home dead as a doornail (148).

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST AND OTHERS LIKE HIM:

Another example where Nick slips into the text current-day references that go unnoticed is found at a critical point when he hosts Gatsby and Daisy at his house; thus begins their re-acquaintance. Outside it is raining. Nick and Gatsby engage in idle conversation while they wait for Daisy to arrive. Gatsby, making small talk, remarks "One of the papers said they thought the rain would stop about four. I think it was *The Journal*" (77). Naming that paper might not be accidental or mere filler. For William Randolph Hearst – a notorious person in so many ways – owned "*The Journal*", and everybody in the United States during "*The Great Gatsby*" era knew it, which bears deeper consideration in just a moment. "*The Journal*"'s reputation for telling the truth over the years had plainly proven suspicious, and, most likely with readers trustworthy only for predicting the weather when a person could confirm it by going outside. Reflection of this sort could have come easily merely mentioning "*The Journal*" to readers of the 1920s. Incidentally, marking this occasion inside the novel, the rain, in fact, did not stop.

Hearst might also have elsewhere hung in the air as an unnamed character in "*The Great Gatsby*". "Dan Cody," Gatsby's surrogate father: a silver, gold, and copper miner (84-91). Cody is a dead-ringer for William Randolph Hearst's father, George Hearst (1820-1891). George Hearst was still a topic of discussion during "*The Great Gatsby*" era (Carlson and Bates, 208). George Hearst was one of the nation's most notorious robber-barons of the nineteenth century, profiting from fraudulent deals, false claims, and exploiting mine-laborers (Lundberg 19). In 1919 -1920, the memory of George Hearst came once again into view in Americans' minds. For, in that year's presidential election, his son, William, energetically sought the Democratic nomination for President, only to lose it to James M. Cox, who was trounced by Republican William G. Harding, who, Hearst, out of spite, then enthusiastically supported (Carlson and Bates 209).

William Randolph Hearst's opponents at the Democratic convention had for

the umpteenth time dredged up the sources of his dirty wealth, inherited when his father died in 1891. Also, at the turn of the century, William proved the apple had not fallen far from the tree when, in order to increase circulation, his newspapers inflamed the United States into war with Spain. Jay Gatsby's birthday, deduced from inside the novel, was 1891, precisely the year George Hearst died.

Another unexplored example where events of the 1920s are drawn into "The Great Gatsby" occurs when Nick and Gatsby wait for Daisy to arrive at Nick's – a reference already cited relating to the weather as reported in "The Journal". Gatsby, leaning on the fireplace mantle, picked up and "looked with vacant eyes through a copy of Clay's Economics" (77). This book exists and, at the time, according to its Preface, was prime reading for would-be bond and security salesmen, "with reference to the experience and interests of the ordinary man" (Clay vii). For nearly 500 pages, this timepiece-sensitive, real-world book goes on blandly to explain itself. But early on it ceases to be a "how to" book. Readers discover it slants toward philosophizing and justifying behavior in an environment of "free enterprise or laissez faire" policy (423). For instance, multiply its message below by about ten-thousand times and the gist of Clay's "Economics" becomes clear:

The greatest social evil of the day is not the inequality of wealth, but the selfishness and insensibility to the sufferings of others that makes all attempt to secure greater equality so difficult. If the Christian Churches' preaching of the importance of wealth and the duty of unselfishness were effective, the path of reform would be smoothed. (422) Essentially, Clay's logic centers on the notion that stock and bond salesmen assist rank and file Americans by helping them buy their way out of mainstream poverty. In other words, skilled salesmen favor Americans best when they take their money.

Interestingly, this brings another example to bear where Nick relates outside, true-life examples that figure into his story, and, strangely, where Clay's philosophy shows to have successfully shaped the mindset of middle-Americans toward admiring their economic-overlords. "If he'd [Gatsby] lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country," says Gatsby's father, Henry C. Gatz, over top of his son who is laid out cold in the parlor – a victim of mistaken identity (148). Here is the irony: James Jerome Hill (1838-1916) was a real person, a railroad tycoon from

Minnesota, later turned banker and eventually busted in 1904 for violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (Malone 274). He also wrote a book in 1910, *Highways of Progress*.

Hill's opening sentence of his 353-page treatise is as puzzling as Clay's philosophy about American economics, advocating, "The highest conception of a nation is that of a trustee for posterity" (3). Eventually, for Hill, "a trustee" translates into flesh and blood beings where "the various states furnishes a broad and intelligent foundation upon which to build up a new era of national progress and prosperity" (327). Sounding as though he were advocating brainwashing, Hill promotes the following: If this patriotic gospel is to make headway, it must be by organized missionary work among the people, and by the people. It cannot go on and conquer if imposed from without. It must come to represent the fixed idea of the people's mind, their determination and their hope. (Hill 327-28) Apart from drawing attention to intended symbolism in "The Great Gatsby" behind citing Jerome Hill, and his and Clay's philosophy, suffice to say that Myrtle Wilson's husband (Myrtle was Tom's mistress), proved most effective as a manipulated, misguided instrument of destruction aimed by Tom Buchanan (157). Tom Buchanan, described by Nick as "nibbling at the edge of stale ideas" (23), and, who, when summing up Gatsby to Nick in the end of the novel, avowed, "that fellow had it coming to him. He threw dust into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's, but he was a tough one" (157).

Finally, considering examples imploring greater clarity, there emerges in "The Great Gatsby" an offbeat, almost humorous instance that plays out in a solemn setting during one of the most serious moments in the text: when Gatsby's father speaks with Nick about his son's dedication toward self-improvement. The setting is the occasion of the funeral, where Gatsby lays in the parlor of his magnificent home while his father and Nick wait hopelessly for other attendees. There, as Nick relates, "He [Henry Gatz] pulled from his pocket a ragged old copy of a book called *Hopalong Cassidy*. He opened it at the back cover and turned [to] the last flyleaf [where there] was printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12, 1906" (152).

Gatsby, at 16, had outlined rigorous events for self-improvement, right down to each minute of the day. Both Nick and Gatsby's father agreed, "It just shows you." Shows us what? Readers might ask. Gatsby's father renders, "Jimmy was bound to get ahead" (153). Certain facts outside Nick's story, however, challenge

the pathos of the moment and suggest there is more here than meets the eye. Research revealed Hopalong Cassidy's copyright and its first edition occurred in 1910 – making it a bit unlikely if not impossible that on September 12, 1906, Gatsby drew inspiration from the work and wrote down his schedule for self-improvement. Incidentally, Clarence E. Mulford, author, was alive in 1922, the year in which Nick's story occurs, and 1925, when Fitzgerald's novel was published.

Mulford (1883-1956) is a suspiciously curious sort of fellow. Through the years, he has come to exist as one of the most published authors of Western lore. But the fact remains that Mulford, renowned for writing Western short stories as early as September 14, 1904, actually had never been out West himself. Born in Streator, Illinois, he lived and wrote in Fryeburg, Maine (Barnes). He visited out West, perhaps feeling the call for the very first time in 1926.

CONCLUSION:

Larger-than-life Hopalong Cassidy is like all of the other outsiders toward whom Nick refers or alludes: grand, triumphing examples of modern American men, but, whom, while appearing to promote the greater good also are hollow. Certainly, on the surface in "The Great Gatsby", the serious tone underlying the Horatio-Alger theme of "rags to riches" seems plausible and applicable to Jay Gatsby. But there also could be for readers and scholars something else to consider: Nick's story intends to make nothing more than fun of the whole lot.

Hayden White in "Tropics of Discourse, Essays in Cultural Criticism" contends "history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation" (122). White maintains historians and novelists are inescapably flip sides of the same coin, for "Every fiction must pass a test of correspondence – it must be adequate as an image of something beyond itself if it is to lay claim to presenting an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world" (122). In closing, there is an excellent case in point. A baffling episode in the novel takes in a tiny instance where Tom reluctantly decides to buy Myrtle (his mistress) a puppy, and, in Nick's assessment, "We backed up to a gray old man who bore an absurd resemblance to John D. Rockefeller" (28). The question begging an answer is why, in fiction, compare the panhandler selling mixed-breed puppies to, of all people, Rockefeller? What, if any, contemporaneous meaning comes from such a potshot? Beyond face value, it gives pause for

readers to reflect upon yesterdays, and, thus, to engage the feeling of what it would have been like to understand outside the context of the novel the cultural goings-on that inspired folk like Nick in "The Great Gatsby" to see such things as they did. Literature provides historians a place to look for those answers.

Works Cited

Angle, Paul M., and John Y. Simon. "Bloody Williamson: A Chapter in American Lawlessness". Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Barnes, Jack. "The Secret Life of Clarence Mulford." "Magnetic North: Stories from the Archives" 4:2 (Summer 1986).

Baude, Leora. "Turf Wars: English and History Mix It Up on the Fields of Study." "The College: Indiana University, Bloomington" (Summer 2001): 8-9.

Benet, William Rose. "An Admirable Novel:" Rev. of "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald". "Saturday Review" 1 (May 9, 1925): 739.

Berman, Ronald. "'The Great Gatsby' and Modern Times". Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

Bicknell, J. "The Waste Land of F. Scott Fitzgerald." "Virginia Quarterly Review", XXX, 1954: 27-48.

"Boston Judge Fines Woman \$100 for Circulating 'Simon Called Peter'." "New York Times", October 19, 1922: 2:7.

Brannigan, John. "New Historicism and Cultural Materialism". New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Brucoli, Matthew, ed. "New Essays on The Great Gatsby". Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

Bryer, Jackson R., and John Kuehl, eds. "Dear Scott/Max: The Fitzgerald-Perkins Correspondence". New York: Cassell, 1971.

Carlson, Oliver, and Ernest Sutherland Bates. "Hearst: Lord of San Simeon". New York: Viking Press, 1936.

Clark, Edwin. "Scott Fitzgerald Looks into Middle Age: Rev. of "The Great Gatsby" by F. Scott Fitzgerald". "New York Times", April 19, 1925; Sunday ed.: C9.

Clay, Henry. "Economics: An Introduction for the General Reader". New York: Macmillan, 1918.

de Koster, Katie, ed. and intro. "Readings on 'The Great Gatsby'". San Diego, CA.: Greenhaven, 1998.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. "The Great Gatsby". New York: Scribner's, 1925.

Geck, John A. "The Novels of Horatio Alger, Jr." The University of Rochester. March 30, 2009 .

<<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cinder/Horatiomain.htm>>

Gross, Dalton, and Mary Jean Gross. "Understanding "The Great Gatsby": A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents". Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998.

"Harding Declares the Right to Work must be Upheld." "New York Times", July 5, 1922: sec. 1: 1+.

"Harding, Warren G." "The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia". 15th ed. 1978: 902-903.

Hill, James Jerome. "Highways of Progress". New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1910

"Joyous Crowds Hail Harding Auto Caravan." "New York Tribune", July 3, 1922: 1:4.

Keable, Robert. "Simon Called Peter". New York: E. P. Dutton, 1921.

Kunstler, William Moses. "The Hall-Mills Murder Case: The Minister and the Choir Singer". Trenton, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980.

Lundberg, Ferdinand. "Imperial Hearst". New York: Equinox Cooperative Press, 1936.

Malone, Michael P. "James J. Hill: Empire Builder of the Northwest".

Norman, OK: University of
Oklahoma Press, 1996.

Matterson, Stephen. "The Great Gatsby' – (The Critics Debate)". London:
MacMillan, 1990.

"Rail Strike, 450,000 More May Get Rail Strike Call To-day." "New York
Tribune", July 3, 1922: 1:4-5.

"Rector and Woman Choir Singer Found Murdered in Field." "New York Times",
September 17, 1922: 1:3.

"Rector Hall Sent Singer 'Spicy' Books." "New York Times", October 7, 1922:
32:2.

"Returns \$1,500 As Economy Example." "New York Tribune", July 3, 1922: 1:3.

Richter, David H., ed. and intro. "The Critical Tradition". Boston: Bedford
Books, 1998.

"Robert Keable Dies in Tahiti at 40 Years." "New York Times", December 25,
1927: 5:2.

"Simon Called Peter: Rev. of Simon Called Peter, by Robert Keable". "New
York Times Book Review and Magazine", January 22, 1922: sec. III, 21:1.

"Sumner Denounces Book in Hall Case." "New York Times" October 20, 1922:
3:7.

Tredell, Nicolas, ed. and intro. "F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Great Gatsby",
Essays, Articles, and Reviews Columbia Critical Guides". New York: Columbia
Univeristy Press, 1999.

Way, Brian. "F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction". London:
Edward Arnold, 1980.

White, Hayden. "Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism".
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Wright, James Arlington. "Two Poems About President Harding" in "bove the
River: The Complete Poems". Donald Hall, ed. New York: Frarrar, Straus, and
Giroux, 1990: 119-121.

“Wright, James – Introduction.” “Poetry Criticism”. Elisabeth Gellert, ed..
Vol. 36. Gale Cengage, 2002.