

Reading F.S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* through Aristotle's Eyes: Friendship, Gifts, and Commodities

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Abstract

This research explores the interlocked notions of friendship, community, gift, and commodity culture in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. It seeks to demonstrate that Fitzgerald's ethical vision of friendship, community, the Bad, and the Good are deeply shaped by Aristotle's works *The Nicomachean Ethics*, *The Politics*, and *The Metaphysics*. The extent to which Aristotle has shaped the form and contents of *The Great Gatsby*, a novel rightly described as a classic of its genre and how far the contentious aspect of its gendered and orientalized characterization can be traced to Fitzgerald's dialogic relation with the Greek philosopher are among certain questions that this research addresses. The approach to the issue and the related questions stated above is eclectic. It draws its paradigms, partly from Bakhtin's dialogical theory, partly from economic and cultural anthropology, and partly from postcolonial, historical theory of the type elaborated by Said and Fanon.

Key-words: Aristotle, 1920s America, community, commodities, friendship, Fitzgerald, gifts

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Introduction

None of F. Scott Fitzgerald's other literary works, whether in poetry or prose, has received as much critical attention as his *The Great Gatsby* (1925). If it is true, as it is sometimes claimed, in critical circles, that authors really produce only a single book that they keep re-writing in different forms, *The Great Gatsby* is certainly the case. Among all his books, it is this novel that has earned Fitzgerald the title of the novelist. To date, it has been read from so many perspectives that it has become very difficult, indeed, for belated researchers to carve a niche in the huge of scholarship that it has already amassed. However, notwithstanding the intimidating volume of literature presently at hand, *The Great Gatsby*, just like the Sphinx, never ceases to invite the reader to try to solve its hidden mysteries. The purpose of this research is to do just a little of that in its focus on the interlocked issue of friendship, gift, commodities, and social bonds in the novel.

The issues of the gift, commodities, and social bonds in American literature have already attracted the attention of Hyde (2007), who has opened new avenues in American literary studies ever since the publication of his first book in 1983. The works by Emerson, Whitman, and Pound, among other American writings, have been analyzed from the anthropological perspective to show to what extent artistic creativity and the artist in American culture are deeply steeped in the world of the gift and gift exchange contra the money-centered drive of capitalism. Following in Hyde's steps, scholars like Zerar (Personal communication made at the 15th International F. Scott Fitzgerald Society Conference, June 24-29, 2019) and Lacey (2018) have recently applied the theory of the gift as Potlatch in a tentative attempt to shed new light into *The Great Gatsby*. However, though these critics are to the point in ranging Fitzgerald alongside his American fellow writers as an author interested in the "world of the gift," an aspect of Fitzgerald's novel, consciously or unconsciously overlooked by Hyde, their studies concentrate so much on the negative perception of Potlatch, as a warlike conception of gift exchange, that they sidestepped its positive aspect, which is the strengthening of social bonds in a world dominated by commodity exchange.

How does this issue of the gift link up with the equally important theme of friendship in *The Great Gatsby*? From which philosophical and ethical sources, Fitzgerald draws the concept of friendship? On what types of friendships do the imagined communities in Fitzgerald's novel rest? In what ways these types of friendships contribute to or unravel social bonding in the novel? These are some of the questions that previous studies of *The Great Gatsby* have not yet fully attended to. The central claim of this research is that friendship is the core around which the themes of the gift, commodity exchange, and social bonding coalesce. Unless consideration is accorded to the manner Fitzgerald makes use of the gift to critique the American consumerist society of the 1920s, the social, moral, and aesthetic significance of *The Great Gatsby* for both Fitzgerald's contemporaries and today's readers, the issues that the novel raises will not be appreciated at its real value.

The approach to this above-stated issue is basically dialogic or intertextual in Bakhtin's sense of the word. The intertext that is considered as the key text for grasping the social, moral,

and cultural implications of the friendship of *The Great Gatsby* is Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* (1987), *The Politics* (1992), and *The Metaphysics* (1998). In the former work, Aristotle defines friendship in terms of virtue, which he holds as "natural, as the bond of society, and as morally noble. (1987, p. 204)" He distinguishes between three distinct types of friendship, a friendship of utility and pleasure on the one hand, and friendship of virtue, on the other hand. The latter species is higher in personal and social ranking, for contrary to the two other types, it has a permanent rather than an accidental quality. The "perfect type of friendship," as Aristotle (1987, p. 204) has written, "is that between the good, and those who resemble each other in virtue." Further details from *The Nicomachean Ethics* and the two other works by Aristotle are proffered as the discussion below goes along. Here it is important to add that this ethical, political, and philosophical approach to friendship and related themes like the gift, commodities, and social bonding is supplemented by studies of the complex issue of gift and commodity exchange by scholars like Malinowski (1922), Mauss (2002), Schrift (1997), Weiner (1992), Godbout (1998), Gregory (2015), to mention but a handful.

Tom Buchanan's self-exclusion of the world or community of the gift

All of Tom Buchanan's friendships in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, including the one he has presumably developed during his school days with Carraway, the narrator-character, at college are friendships of utility, friendships intended primarily to show off his virility with both sexes, by resorting to bullying. For instance, as a college boy, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he bestows his beneficence to those he considers his most intimate friends, such as Carraway, on the condition for them to be at his beck and call. From the outset he is depicted as a bulky, racist man, looking at the world from a narrow-minded perspective. Tom is not even capable of developing a friendship of the pleasure type that Aristotle holds as superior to friendship of utility. At home, he fails to appreciate the pleasure of being in the company of his wife with his mind perpetually distracted by his adulterous relationships. We see him standing aloof and declining to meddle with other guests attending Gatsby's party, which he churlishly dismissed as a "menagerie." The only person to have bonded with him in terms of the friendship of pleasure is Myrtle. Even so, Myrtle suffers severe bruising at the hands of her paramour Tom for having dared to divulge the name of his wife before the guests in Myrtle's New York City private apartment. He presumably does not want to lose his social respectability because of an adulterous relationship, which paradoxically he is proud to share with Carraway, as an old school chum of his. The purpose of letting out the secret is to show that he has not lost the success that he used to have with women at college.

Zerar (2019) and Lacey (2018) have analyzed the mythical aspect of Tom by referring to the monstrous figure of Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey*. The clue to this archetypal interpretation of this character, a foil to *The Great Gatsby*, is his dismissal of the latter as a "Nobody from nowhere" during their confrontation for the love of Daisy in the Plaza Hotel. "Nobody" is the name that Odysseus cries out to the blinded Cyclops to trick out his fellow monsters and escape identification by the patron sea god of the Cyclops, Poseidon. Indeed, the Cyclops holds the clue to the archetypal identity of Tom given the moral and the physical monstrosity, or deformity of the latter described

above. However, in stating their case, Zerar and Lacey have missed the important detail that the Cyclops, as Vernont (1965), has rightly put it belongs to a place, the Island of Sicily, imagined in Homer's *Odyssey*, as a place that refuses gift exchange and hospitality. In other words, Tom does not belong to the world (Godbout, 2000) or the community of the gift (Hyde, 1983). Completely ignorant of the "logic of the gift," both Tom and his archetype, lack the disposition "toward an ethic of generosity" (Shrift, 1997), which Aristotle places at the core of the friendship of virtue and the community of friends it is associated with.

What is said about Tom's typically utilitarian "friendship" holds true for many other friendships in *The Great Gatsby*. The case is the same for the relation between Wolfsheimer, the Jew, and Gatsby; Myrtle and her husband, Wilson; Jordan and Carraway; Carraway and Tom; Tom and Daisy; and the established residents of East Egg and the *nouveau riche* world of West Egg; and finally the miserably poor residents of the Valley of Ashes and the rest of the New Yorkers. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that friendship, especially in its civil concord aspect, is the cement of the polity. For Fitzgerald, through his character-narrator as participant-observer of social life in New York City, the predominance of the two inferior, perverted types of friendship – in other words, the pleasure and utility types of friendship – and the scarcity of the perfect third type of friendship, called the friendship of virtue are strong indications that the American society of the 1920s had trodden the dangerous path of unraveling its social fabric.

Gatsby's friendship of virtue in the world of commodities

Whatever has already been said about inoperative friendships in Fitzgerald's novel, it would be stretching the truth a little if no exceptions to the rule are allowed. One such exception is the posthumous friendship that Carraway avows of the hero at the beginning and the end of the novel, when all the utilitarian friends of Gatsby have deserted him. Whatever negative characteristics can be attached to Gatsby, as the main romance character, he still embodies the good that is usually the hallmark of the protagonists in the romance genre. His agonistic relationship with Tom is also conventional in the sense that, in romance, there is a conflict between the good and the bad. However, this being said, he is the one man whose friendship has the attributes of that perfect type of friendship Aristotle calls the friendship of virtue. Hence, in the course of the romance, Gatsby keeps alive the friendship with his mentor Dan Cody/Bufalo Bill by having a portrait of his place in his library. To Carraway's question as to the identity of the man in the portrait, Gatsby unhesitatingly responds that he is "my friend." Keeping a memory of a friend, who in his words has fashioned his character through appropriate education, shows the extent to which he appreciates the good that is done to him, regardless of the fact that he is tricked out of his pecuniary gains by Dan Cody's mistress. The other characteristic that makes his friendship a friendship of virtue is that "smile" of his, which distinguishes him from churlish and fawning people around him in the days of his magnificence. It is this smile that has compelled Dan Cody to make him his closest friend.

However, we would say that Gatsby's virtuous friendship shows mostly his devotion to his love in the Platonic sense of the word. Though unrequited in his love, he sticks to it up to his tragic

fall at the end of the romance, which, in this particular case, really deserves the qualification of “secular scripture” that Frye (1976) has accorded to it. The character of the good man, or the perfect friend, Aristotle tells us, is steadfast. It does not “ebb and flow like the tide” (1996, p. 242). Though crossed in his love, Gatsby never desponds, or loses his sense of chivalry and his gallant disposition. Unrequited in his love, Gatsby practically falls in love with love, in other terms with the Platonic idea that he makes of love. From the outset of the romance, Gatsby, as a clam-digger and salmo fisher, is figured out as a “fisher of men,” particularly when this trade is associated with that enticing smile of his. It is true that he is recruited as a bootlegger gangster. However, this does not throw a shadow over his character, for as Red and Edwards, have pointed out, the gangster at that time “was elevated to a sort of public hero as though American worship of success had finally burst out all bounds in its admiration for the slick operator” (1967, p. 309). Indeed, Gatsby’s gangster activity may be out of moral bounds, but he has been reluctantly enticed into it. If he is drawn to this immoral activity, it is not because he has an evil purpose in mind, but he desperately lacks the wherewithal to re-gain that supreme good, which is love.

The issue in Gatsby’s romance or novel is that love has become a commodity. Just like any other marketable good, love can be bought and sold. To use Weiner’s book title (1992), love no longer belongs to that category of things, which in the world or community of the gift, are called “inalienable possessions.” Furthermore, as Carraway tells the reader, Gatsby “has an extraordinary gift of hope, such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again” (p.8). It is such a permanent and absolute attribute that makes Gatsby’s friendship, a friendship of virtue. As a donor of immaterial, spiritual goods such as the gift of hope, of love as a gift, and an ever-ready winning smile, Gatsby cuts the high figure of Christ. Romance is displaced by tragedy toward the end of the novel, but like all heroes he leaves behind him a literary testament written by his disciple/friend (Carraway). This testament reminds the reader that love and the community of friendship will ultimately triumph, though the world of commodities has temporarily encroached on the inalienable possessions called love and the friendship of virtue. These non-reciprocated, immaterial gifts that Gatsby bestows on his friend, and which in his turn transmits to his readers in his tragic romance, or “secular scripture” to employ Frye’s words again, belies Derrida’s (1994) strong claim that free or “pure” gifts belong to the world of the impossible.

Carraway’s conversion into the community of the gift

As Aristotle recognizes, there are some gifts between equal friends that cannot be repaid because “their worth cannot be measured against money.” The Greek philosopher gives the typical illustration of a friend who has learned philosophy from another friend to support his case. Thus, Aristotle, contra Derrida (1994) and Mauss (1990), admits that there is, indeed, such a thing as the free gift, or “transfer that need not be returned” (1941 a: IX. 1.11164b2). This Aristotelian definition of gift fits well with the immaterial gifts that Gatsby bequeathed to his comrades-in-arms and friend of virtue, Carraway. Though the latter expresses his gratitude to Gatsby, Gatsby’s gift-giving underscores the possibility of annulling the reciprocal obligation or debt generally associated with gift-giving, and of going beyond monetary calculations and the economy of the

market place. For all the reasons stated above, there is the need to re-evaluate the critique that Riche (Personal communication made at the 15th International F. Scott Fitzgerald Society Conference, June 24-29, 2019) has leveled against the character-narrator, Nick Carraway, whom he has off-handedly dismissed as a failed Wall Street bondsman turned artist writer (2019). On the contrary, when Carraway is considered, in the light of his change of attitude toward Gatsby, the former does not look as a failed businessman in the bonds market, who is compelled to fall back on writing commercially successful books as an alternative to the bonds business to make up a return on investment. He cuts the high figure of a constant friend who has rallied to Gatsby's call for love in the same way as Christ's disciples, such as Jean did in the Christian love book par excellence, which is *The New Testament*. This comes with the reminder that Aristotle's conception of the friendship of virtue finds an echo in Christian love as depicted in *The New Statement*.

A huge number of critics have the tendency to link romance in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* only with the central hero, overlooking the fact that Nick Carraway is also involved in a romance by leaving the Middle West. Deeply traumatized by his participation in the Great War, he grows restless in "that the ragged edge of the universe [and] goes East to learn the bond business" (p.9). This quest motif is a hallmark of the genre of romance typically illustrated by the story of the Holy Grail. As already suggested above, his initial quest to make pecuniary gains by initiating himself into the trade of bondsman does not turn as well as he has expected, so he involves himself instead in an alternative spiritual enterprise by trying his hand at writing about social bonds. In his first observation of social life in New City as a participant-observer, Carraway has a very negative attitude to Gatsby's princely pretensions, going so far as to dismiss him as a "Turbaned character leaking sawdust [in other words an effigy] at every pore as he pursued a tiger through the Bois de Boulogne" (p.71), a red district in Paris, France. Thus Gatsby's pretention to a courageous big game hunter is, in Carraway's eyes, reduced to a chasing of women of ill-repute in the notorious red zone of the French capital.

However, in the course of the narrative, Carraway comes to make a distinction between Gatsby and Tom, appreciating the former at his real value as the Grail he is looking for to heal his war-psychopathological wounds. Toward the end of the novel, he becomes an intimate good friend of Gatsby, joyfully accepting rides in the front seat of Gatsby's Rolls Royce; giving him good advice in the extremely difficult situation that he has landed himself in the run-and-hit accident; admiring his generosity in covering for Daisy and taking the blame for what his golden girl, or girlfriend has done; and waking up in the early morning just to hurry to Gatsby's home, to share a cigarette smoking with him and see how well he has managed the situation. After giving him advice to run away before the police track his Rolls Royce down in his garage, he expresses his admiration for Gatsby before he reluctantly leaves his friend Gatsby for work, fearing what might eventually happen to him. As he tells the reader, "Before I reached the hedge, I remembered something and turned around. "They are a rotten crowd," I shouted. "You are worth the whole damn lot of them together" (1994, p. 160). Thus, swept along by the force of affection of friendship, Carraway clears his friend's name that has been mudded throughout the romance. The

force of his ethical friendship is such that it is the only friend to stay in Gatsby's home to take in charge of the funeral ceremony.

Gatsby's magnificence

Critics have paid little attention to the title of Fitzgerald's romance, *The Great Gatsby*, which in the French language translates as *Gatsby le Magnifique*. This title shows the extent of respect and the touching devotion that Carraway has for his deceased friend. The reader remembers that at the outset of his romance, in consequence of his father's advice, Gatsby is "inclined to reserve all judgments, a habit that has opened up many curious natures to me and made me the victim of not a few veteran bores" (p.1). As shown above, this parental advice to get rid of judgmental attitude toward people helps him to play perfectly the role of a participant-observer of social life in New York City. Still, he does not totally manage to hold his tongue, particularly with regard to women, the colored people, and the Orientals. With Gatsby, he makes a short case of his father's piece of advice, moving from an adversarial to a friendly judgment with this ultimate statement that "Gatsby turned out all right at the end, it is what preyed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated in the wake of his dreams that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of me" (1994, P. 8). These attenuating circumstances in Carraway's tribute to and sanctification of Gatsby have the Christian overtone of the absolution of temporary temptation by sin. Even Jesus is not exempt from the temptation of evil, given his nature as both human and divine.

Writing a book about a remarkable friend that he entitles *The Great Gatsby* is a way of cherishing his fond memories of an honorable man and perpetual friend. In Fitzgerald's romance, reference is made several times to tableaux. At its outset, Carraway ironically points to his resemblance to the war profiteering great grandfather's brother, the one who established the fortune of what he calls the Carraway "clan". "I never saw this great-uncle," he tells the reader, tongue in cheek, but I supposed to look like him – with special reference to the rather hard-boiled painting that hangs in father's office" (p. 9). As the romance unfolds, Carraway again observes that Gatsby has placed a portrait of Dan Cody whom he calls a friend on the dressing table of his room. Carraway's story of the great Gatsby cannot be set apart from this predominant iconology. In other words, the story that he sets out about his friend is intended as a portrait, or rather an icon that will be a lasting memorial to a remarkably good man, comrade-in-arms, and virtuous friend. He makes a second homecoming to Louisville a healed man, just as if he had touched the Grail, which Gatsby has vainly pursued. He also comes back to the West as a born-again convert to the community of the gift. It is as a convert to Gatsby's virtue of love and friendship that he writes down the following lines:

When I came back from the East last autumn, I felt that I wanted to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an

unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there is something gorgeous about him; some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away (p.8).

In consigning the above words in his testament, he seems to observe the solemnities of a deceased comrade-in-arms, who, in his uniform, stands in moral attention to salute the memory of an exceptional knight of love who fell in battle in the world of commodities prevailing in the East. The superlative title of the book, *The Great Gatsby*, which Carraway gives to his romance, leads us back to Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* in its evocation of what its author calls *Megaloprepeia*, in other words "magnificence," best rendered in the French title of the book, *Gatsby le Magnifique*. "Magnificence," as Aristotle tells the reader, means "a fitting expenditure involving largeness of scale." It is closely related to civic and religious expenditure on a large scale of generosity, anticipating in these words what George Bataille says about the economy of sumptuous squandering in his *Accursed Share*. Aristotle adds two important remarks about "magnificence" and the "magnificent man" that can help get a short glimpse into what Carraway means by calling the hero of our romance, *The Great Gatsby*. The first remark is that a poor person could be generous, but he could by no means pretend to reach magnificence. The second remark is that the "magnificent man spends not on himself, but public objects and gifts [which] bears some resemblance to votive offerings." Much more importantly, the "magnificent man is like an artist, for he can see what is fitting and spend large sums tastefully," avoiding in this way the sense of vulgarity.

Aristotle's interweaving of the artistic and ethical standards of magnificence associated with generosity, gift, and friendship, prefigure the great importance that philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche and modernist artists in general accord to aesthetic objects, not necessarily in the form of the absolute autonomy of art for art's sake, but in their potential to operate both inside and outside the commercial circuit of commodity exchange. The portrait that Carraway draws of the Great Gatsby falls in this type of aesthetic objects. The sentimental wrappings, in which he packages the portrait of Gatsby for the readers, makes it look like an illiquid gift that sets it quite apart from the ordinary, consumer commodities.

It follows that the epithet of "great" attached to the name of Gatsby by Carraway does not solely invoke the idea of magnificence (*Megaloprepeia* in Greek), as the French translation of Fitzgerald's book as *Gatsby le Magnifique*, rightly suggests. The epithet "great" is also linked to what it exactly says in English, greatness or greatness of soul which Aristotle calls *megalopsychia*. Just like "magnificence," "greatness," or "great souledness" is the third and highest of Aristotle's virtues of giving in Aristotle's ethical scheme. The reader remembers that Carraway avows that when he comes back from the East, he "wanted no more riotous excursions with the privileged glimpses in the human heart" (1994, p. 8). However, immediately after he revises his attitude and makes an exception to his resolution as regards Gatsby the man for whom at his first encounter

with him “represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn (p.8). In hindsight, the fond and cherished memories of the man, who has become a remarkable friend of his in the course of the narrative, loosens his tongue saying the words that accounts for the qualification of Gatsby as a man with a great soul: “There was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away” (1994, p. 8).

Aristotle has called the greatness of soul, “a sort of crown of the virtues, for it makes them greater, and is not found without them.” These are the virtues that will be celebrated later in The New Testament about the spiritually remarkable figure of Christ, who, among other things, has chastened the world of commodities then prevailing in Jerusalem. Aristotle has noted an asymmetry in the practice of giving, for the man with a greatness of soul is “a sort of man to confer benefits, but he is ashamed of receiving them.” The man with the greatness of soul is a man who is always in search of opportunities of acting as a doctor in order to impose his social superiority. We might read Bataille’s idea of potlatch as a social rivalry in Aristotle’s words. For Aristotle, the man with a great soul is always inclined to do everything on a grand scale, and the most outstanding hallmark in his character is “pride,” which far from being a vice “implies greatness, as beauty implies a good-sized body.”

Aristotle’s interweaving of aesthetic and ethical virtues finds an echo in Carraway’s description of the Great Gatsby depicted at once as “great” and “gorgeous”. Pride is also one of his traits particularly with his rival Tom. It is arguably because of Gatsby’s behavior as a proud man always inclined to give gifts to impose his superiority on Tom, the representative of the established wealthy class, which partly accounts for Carraway’s initial “unaffected scorn.” Aristotle offers the reader a key for understanding why he comes to appreciate Gatsby despite what looks like a defect for people without Carraway’s aesthetic sensibility. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle has suggested that ethical friendship might overcome “pride” in the practice of giving and receiving gifts. His character being a compound of outspokenness, honesty, courage, disdain of pettiness and slavishness, the proud man-cum-good man with the greatness of soul, “must be unable to make his life revolve around another, unless it be a friend.” Martha Kendal Woodruff explains perfectly why pride attached to greatness yields to or is suspended in cases of ethical friendship of the type binding Carraway to Gatsby:

The perception that allows Aristotle to go beyond the calculation of gifts is the well-known idea of the friend as ‘another self’ [*allos autos*]. For Aristotle, friendship stimulates both ethical and intellectual achievement. Only through cultivating friendships of virtue do we realize who we are by recognizing ourselves in the other. The human self, to become fully itself, demands an “other,” not an anonymous or abstract other, but an equal, a friend. This relation suggests a far richer understanding of self and other than either a Cartesian model, dependent on an isolated self, or an economic model, dependent on competing self-interests (Woodruff, 2002, p. 124).

The contentious issues of Carraway's imagined community of the gift

The community of the gift that the celebration of friendship implies is deeply controversial in the sense that it is gendered, racial, and class-based. Indeed, when we look into characterization, it is first the female characters, which are lumped together as an outside group, are shouted down one by one, as accountable for the dangerous shift of the American community from the world of the gift into the world of commodities. The conception of women as "poor," "rotten," "bad" drivers is typical of this gender bias. It is these pejorative epithets that Carraway employs to describe Jordan Baker's drive to her home in Warwick for a house party after a summer golf-tournament. Carraway tells the reader that "It was on that same house party that we had a curious conversation about driving a car" (1994, p. 65). This conversation is preceded by Carraway's description of how he has come across Jordan Baker in the golf tournament, and his remembrance of having read about the scandal she has nearly caused at her first golf tournament by shamefacedly breaching the rules of the game. The reminiscence about the scandalous beginning of her career as golf player is triggered by an equally scandalous behavior that of leaving "a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down, (1994, p. 64) and lying about it in the same breath. He closes this introduction to the conversation by making the misogynist qualification of Jordan Baker as "incurably dishonest" woman with "a cool, insolent smile turned to the world [... to] satisfy the demands of her hard, jaunty body" (1994, p. 64-65. Making of Jordan Baker a typical case, the reflection jumps from the particular to the overgeneralization that "Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply" (1994, p. 65).

The curious conversation that Carraway has with Jordan Baker about driving a car comes as Jordan's confirmation of his masculine prejudice toward females, most notably the emancipated types, such as the ones that Fitzgerald nicknamed "the flappers." One particular incident sticks in his mind, and provides an occasion to start the argument of driving wherein Jordan Baker condemns herself as a reckless driver. The conversation, he says to the reader, "started because she passed so close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat" (1994, p. 65). In her offhand response, his reminder about her incautious style of driving, Carraway has put these self-accusing words in her mouth: "They'll keep out of my way [...]. It takes two to make an accident" (1994, p. 65). When she is told to make the supposition that she "met somebody just as careless as herself, she is reported to have made this cynical statement: "I hope I never will [...]. I hate careless people. That's why I like you" (1994, p. 65). Thus, Jordan Baker disqualifies herself as a totally irresponsible driver, selfishly interested in doing everything her own way, and more than that hateful of intelligent males.

Aside from the fact that Carraway is deeply anxious about women wearing men's breaches, as one might say, female drivers as bad drivers symbolize the exclusion of women from the public space. In the American Republic, Carraway suggests, women are not qualified to steer what Plato calls "ship of the state," because of their inherent dishonesty and their blatant lack of social responsibility. This American Republic, as imagined by Carraway, is threatened from the inside by self-willed females making a small case of male virtue, a word, it must be noted, is

etymologically derived from the same root as virility, which is “vir.” It has also to be observed that this gendered conception of females as anti-social, and non-friendly is equally powerful in Aristotle's *The Nicomachean Ethics* and, most particularly, in his *Politics* wherein he describes women as monsters. For both Aristotle and Carraway, women do not have and cannot have their place in the beloved community, or the world of male friends, for they are naturally incapable of working for the common good. In other terms, they are reduced to a subhuman species, a chattel, or subalterns, which must, by all means, be confined to the household alongside slaves and house furniture.

As the major female character in *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy fares as badly as Jordan Baker at the hands of Carraway. The way the love story unfolds shows that they are not cut out of the same cloth, that is the same text(ile)s. Daisy's character development and that of Gatsby go into two opposite directions. The least that can be said is Daisy Fay is at first described in a sympathetic way. She is given the floor to express her disappointment with her husband's infidelity, bigotry, misplaced pride, and racist attitude. However, the arrangement of the events concerning her character is twisted in such a way that, from the role of victim, she shifts into that of Gatsby's complicit tormentor. Progressively, the reader is presented with all her human frailties. Her love for Gatsby turns out to be a passing fad for a World War I soldier, an attractive doughboy stationed in Louisville. She too easily let go of her previous love to move on with life by riding the wave of conspicuous consumption that characterized the “Roaring Twenties,” as Fitzgerald has dubbed the decade of the 1920s. Instead of waiting patiently, in a Penelope fashion, for the return of the Ulysses figure, Gatsby, she quickly disposes of her love commodity to the highest bidder in the marriage or erotic market by marrying Tom to whom she bears a baby daughter, Pam. There is some truth in Woldsworf's claim (2019, p. 236) that Daisy's reality principle allows her to successfully negotiate her mourning over the loss of her lover, Gatsby. And yet the very citation he makes in support of such a claim shows that her mourning is all too brief to be true colors:

She began to cry – she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid and we locked the door and got into a cold bath. [...]. Next day at five o'clock, she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver and started on a three months' trip to the South Seas (1994, p. 236).

Ironically, as Gatsby is making his pilgrimage to Louisville in a desperate attempt to recapture his love, Daisy and Tom are abroad in France for their honeymoon. When the forgotten lover shows up after a difficult *nostos*/homecoming, her love for the newly enriched Gatsby flares into life, but it almost immediately peters out in the Plaza Hotel scene. What is written about her sounds as she is determined to have her last flings with her former lover to pay back in kind the sexual infidelity of an adulterous husband. As the novel draws to the close, the plot is turned one more screw to show her to be as irresponsible as Jordan Baker in driving. Not only does she cause a hit-and-run accident, but she is also complicit with her husband in disclosing the identity of Gatsby, who has covered for her, in order to run away with the murder of Myrtle.

If the contrastive representations of Daisy and Gatsby have to be qualified at all, they can be described as, respectively, Ovidian and Platonic, or Aristotelian. Gatsby's love, as Carraway has reported about it, is "Platonic," that is to say, perfect. It is offered to the reader as a contemplative aesthetic ideal that endures the vicissitudes of time. By contrast, Daisy's love is liable to metamorphosis, i.e., to easily change. Thus, Daisy, like all female figures in the novel, shows a lack of character. Carraway even uses irony to point out that Daisy is short of virtue. Indeed, it is irony that peeps out behind Carraway's reference to Daisy's daughter, Pam, who is presented to both Carraway and Gatsby. Pam is an oblique reference to Richardson's, Pamela, the eponymous heroine. The reader remembers that the full title of Richardson's book is *Pamela, or, virtue rewarded*. Daisy is strikingly different from Richardson's heroine of virtue. Instead of being rewarded for virtue, Daisy is seen rather as an adulterous woman, at whom Pam, her daughter, points an accusation finger. In Carraway's characterization, Pam is to Daisy what the elf-child Pearl is to the adulterous Hester Prynne in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

In the final analysis, in accordance with clear-cut Aristotelian distinctions between the bad and the good that Carraway has made his own, Daisy is lumped together with the philosophical or ethical category of the bad, best represented by Tom. The following condemnatory lines about the cynical attitude to human life clearly make it clear that Tom and Daisy are cut of the same cloth or textile:

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw then what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – They smashed up things and creatures, and then retreated 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 (1994, p. 186).

Carraway's above final outrage at Tom's and Daisy's unethical complicity is misleading, for, from the outset, Carraway shows if they flock together, it is because they are of the same feather. It is not difficult for the reader to gather that Carraway's characterization of Tom is that of a wealthy draft dodger and war profiteer trying to make up for his cowardice in the eyes of his community by playing on the cord of social, racial, and class prejudice. Licari (2019) and Lacey (2018) have superbly illustrated this character trait from this citation included in Carraway's evocation of how Daisy comes to meet Tom while Gatsby is fighting in "that delayed Teutonic migration known as the Great War" (1994, p. 6). Tom and Daisy seem to enact the roles of the mythical figures of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in Homer's *The Iliad*: Daisy, the reader is informed, "didn't play around with the soldiers any more but only with a few flat-footed, shortsighted young men in town, who couldn't get into the army at all" (1994, p. 60). Carraway suggests through such derogatory statements that those who have come to inherit post-World War America are made of unethical stuff at the detriment of the real war heroes, like Gatsby, Carraway himself, and the Owl-Eyed man.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the disbanded or demobilized war heroes are forgotten because the people and the nation as a whole have decided to turn the page of the Great War, the Spanish influenza, kin to Covid 19 of our time, race riots, anarchist plots as well as labor strikes. President Warren Harding well summarizes the spirit of the second decade of the twentieth century in his Normalcy speech of May 1920:

America's present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality.

It goes without saying that adjustment to the normative model of society for which Harding has called is not easy to realize for traumatized veterans like Gatsby and Carraway. Harding's emphasis on normalcy finds an echo in Carraway's ironic reference to "war bores," obliged to tell their stories in an erotic vein. As it is rendered, Carraway's story of love in War- and Post- World I context, it is not just story of women that have unmanned the "band of brothers" (the words are Shakespeare's) and threatened the social fabric through their erratic asocial drives, but also that of the threat of laborers, Orientals, and the black males. How far the community is at loose ends is expressed in the accident scene in chapter III, wherein a crowd is gathered around two collided cars. In the process of collision, one of the cars has one of its front wheels wrenched off. When its driver comes out to check why his auto is not moving, he stupidly asks the question whether it has "run out of gas" while "half a dozen fingers pointed at the amputated wheel" (1994, p. 61). Still not realizing the mechanical damage, he adds another stupidity to the first one by asking the crowd: "Wonder'ff tell me where there's a gas'line station" (1994, p. 6). For Carraway, this car accident typically illustrates the extent to which American society has lost its direction.

In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) writes that Western authors often deploy the Orient in all its aspects for "local uses." Such statement is true to facts in *The Great Gatsby*, where the eponymous hero is explicitly compared to Trimalchio. As is well-known from biographical information, the name of this mythological figure, inspired by the Roman author Petronius, was originally intended to be the title of the novel. A huge number of critics have tried to make a linkage between Trimalchio and Gatsby on the one hand, and their economic success and their quest for social prestige through the organization of banquets. To recap what has already been said above, the parties that Gatsby throws in West Egg resemble the ceremonies of potlatch. The latter are celebrated in a war-like spirit in Gatsby's mansion, a glitz Camelot with the sole view to win back Daisy's heart from Tom's grips in East Egg. The literary "parallel lives" between Petronius' Trimalchio and Fitzgerald is made by critics, who have accorded only a little attention to its Orientalism, and its political and socio-cultural implications.

Grimal offers the key to Carraway's Orientalism when he writes that "De façon générale, tandis que le siècle d'Auguste avait prétendu amorcer une réaction contre le luxe et retourner aux vertus ancestrales, on assiste avec la période suivante, à l'envahissement de Rome par la civilisation orientale (Grimal, 1967, p. 84). /Overall, while the century of Augustus had presumably sought to react against luxury and to return to ancestral virtues, in the subsequent period, we witness the overwhelming of Rome by oriental civilization/. Grimal refers to Petronius' *Satyricon* and Trimalchio, one of the major characters of the book, for evidence of his assertive claim. Among other things, he underlines how at the end of the reign of Nero, the fifth Emperor of Rome, infamously remembered for extravagance and debauchery, undermined the social and political fabric of the Roman Empire through the influx of newly enfranchised Semites like Trimalchio. Grimal goes on to explain how the frugal Roman way of life that had prevailed during the first century of the Roman Empire was shaken at its foundations by the introduction of the oriental, luxurious model of society brought into Rome by economically successful Orientals admitted not only as citizens of Rome but also as chief players on the political stage.

Looked at closely, the above surface parallel lives of Petronius' Trimalchio and Fitzgerald's/Carraway's *Gatsby* is sustained by a deep parallel between the decadent careers of the Roman Empire and the United States of America. It has to be noted that America really started to play the role of empire only in the last years of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth with the annexation of Spanish colonies such as Cuba and the Philippines. Its participation in the Great War strongly consolidated its imperial status among the other empires of the time. The concern over empire in *The Great Gatsby* is not just a matter of literary reference to Petronius' oriental character Trimalchio, but also of fantasized Orient that found its way into the American imagination and life through movies like Thomas E. Edison's *A street Arab* (1898), *Arabian gun twirler* (1899) released by the American Mutoscope, *The Sheikh* (1921) by the Famous Players Lasky Corporation, and *The Sheikh's wife* (1922) by Harilal C. Twitwedi, and *The village Sheikh* (1922). The rhyme sung by children in *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates how these movies about the oriental figure of the Sheikh entered into popular usage. *Gatsby* is doubly orientalized in Fitzgerald's novel since he is associated with both Trimalchio and the Sheikh. It important to observe that Rudolph Valentino played the role of Sheikh Ahmed Ben Hassan in the 1921 version of the movie features. Obviously, *Gatsby* and his tragic destiny are patterned on the dark-skinned Italian-born actor, Rudolph Valentino, the sex symbol of the 1920s and his tragically premature death.

In elaborating his fictionalized drama, Carraway also makes *Gatsby* play a minstrelsy role. The reader remembers that Dan Cody, the fictional Buffalo Bill in Fitzgerald's work, is a showman and that he is represented as *Gatsby*'s surrogate father. Apprenticed to a showman, it is not surprising that *Gatsby* is given several roles to play, at the same time, including that of a white man/actor passing for a black man by the blackening of the face just as in minstrel shows. Minstrel shows, it has to be noted, were still in fashion in the world of American theater of the 1920s, and their prevailing influence of Minstrelsy on American drama can be felt in O'Neill's *Emperor*

Jones. Looked at from this perspective, Fanon (1967) provides a key for understanding the complexity of Gatsby's desperate attempt to move from "rags to riches" to marry his golden girl, Daisy, and integrate the established white elite. Speaking of the black man's alienation, Fanon writes what follows:

I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white.

Now – and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged – who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me, she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.

I am a white man.

Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization. ...

I marry white culture, white beauty, white civilization.

When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine (Fanon, 1967, p. 63).

This situation of alienation described by Fanon finds an ironic echo in Carraway's characterization of Gatsby's erotic quest for Daisy and the civilization that she stands for. Such an interpretation is plausible in the light of the interest paid to Jazz in the novel, whose author is famous for the catchy phrase "the Jazz Age." Moreover, this Jazz Age was marked by the Harlem Renaissance, whose white patron is Carl Van Vechten. And yet, no matter Gatsby's success in playing a part in Carraway's staged minstrel show, Gatsby, to come back to the metaphor of driving used in this section, is not spared the consequences of reckless driving that characterizes the whole community. As Carraway suggests to the reader in the culture of commodity peculiar to the community of the bad, such as Tom and Daisy, Gatsby's romantic quest for the golden girl is doomed to failure before it even starts. On his road, he meets what Carraway calls a "colossal accident."

Conclusion

To sum up, this research has demonstrated that the reader of *The Great Gatsby* is offered the gift of a hero and a book of which America is particularly fond at all times. Its narrator/character employs a moral or ethic framework (the first and last chapters of the book) inspired by an Aristotelian vision of ethics and politics to distinguish between the community of friendship or the community of the gift, and the community of the bad. However, as the second section of the research has shown Carraway's ethic and political model of community rests on gender, racial, and class prejudices. As it is conceived and perceived in *The Great Gatsby*, friendship is a monopoly of white males, most notably the outrageously forgotten white World War I veterans in whose memory the book was written. It is highly symbolical that the funeral ceremony of the tragic hero is attended only by two friends of virtue, Carraway and the Owl-Eyed man, the literary surrogate of Roosevelt, a World War I veteran and creator of the American Legion. Thus, in a culture of commodity that has made short shrift of the virtue of heroism and friendship as social cement of the polity, *The Great Gatsby* can be read not as an elegy for the passing of a heroic age, but also a re-affirmation of ethical order in the face of the decadence of all sorts.

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