**Jay Gatsby in ‘The Great Gatsby’, by F Scott Fitzgerald**

*Jay Gatsby is the central character in The Great Gatsby. He is wealthy, enigmatic and a master of illusion but his dream is to win back his lost love.*

**Background**

*The Great Gatsby*by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a novel of the 1920s and it is set against the background of the Jazz Age. Jay Gatsby is the main character in this book but he does not appear at the start of this novel. He is only referred to by other people. Since he is only known by his reputation, he seems to be both enigmatic and mysterious. Later on, we discover that he is fabulously rich and that he is involved in illegal bootlegging. Gatsby tries to keep his shady dealings hidden from others. He prefers to play the role of the lavish host at his frequent parties.

**A Lost Love**

When Gatsby was a young man he met a charming young girl called Daisy and fell in love with her. He lied about his background and asked her to wait for him until after the war, but she did not wait. Daisy married Tom Buchanan and her life moved on. Now, years later, Gatsby is determined to win Daisy back. He spends a lot of his time gazing at the green light on the Buchanan’s dock and dreaming of being reunited with his lost love.

**Nick and Gatsby**

Nick, the narrator, of the novel, meets Gatsby and they soon become friendly. Meeting Nick is very helpful for Gatsby because Nick is Daisy’s cousin. Gatsby claims to remember Nick from the war but we can’t be sure if this is true. Once Nick realises the depth of Gatsby’s passion he agrees to arrange a meeting between Gatsby and Daisy. Nick is keen to help his neighbour and he seems to admire Gatsby’s sense of passion and purpose.

Gatsby has an idealised vision of Daisy and perhaps Nick has an idealised vision of Gatsby. The relationship between these two men frames all the other relationships in *The Great Gatsby.* It is possible that they represent two very different aspects of the writer. Nick is quiet and reflective whereas Gatsby is more exuberant. Near the end of the novel, Nick makes a clear statement to demonstrate the affinity he feels with Gatsby when he says: ‘ You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.’ Gatsby responds to these words with a radiant smile.

**The Great Gatsby**

Gatsby seems to enjoy creating his own identify and hiding his impoverished past. He wears elegant clothes, drives a distinctive car and hosts lavish parties where he plays the role of the grand host. However, Gatsby is an observer in his own home. He stands aside and watches as others enjoy themselves. His focus is always fixed on his quest to win back Daisy. Gatsby has even changed his name from James Gatz in order to complete his new identity. It is this sense of self invention which gives Gatsby his quality of “greatness” and it is Nick who calls him ‘Great’. The title of this novel reminds us of magicians like “The Great Houdini” suggesting that Jay Gatsby is also a master of illusion.

As the novel progresses, Fitzgerald shows us more and more of the real Gatsby. The central character is presented as a dreamer and it becomes increasingly clear that his dreams will not come true. This could relate to the wider theme of the American Dream. Gatsby tries to get Daisy to express her love for him, and to deny that she has ever loved her husband, but she is unable or unwilling to do so. At this moment Gatsby’s dreams begin to shatter.

**The Death of Hope**

The hope, in this book, finally fades after Myrtle Wilson’s death. Tom Buchanan, who is jealous of Gatsby, convinces Myrtle’s husband that Gatsby was to blame for her death, even though the real culprit was Daisy. Myrtle was actually having an affair with Tom. After Myrtle's death, Nick wants Gatsby to leave his home but Gatsby is determined to stay close to his beloved Daisy.

As the novel draws to an end, Gatsby asks his gardener to postpone the draining of the swimming pool because he wants to have one final swim, before the end of summer. This is ironic because Gatsby is shot, in his own pool , by George Wilson, who then commits suicide. Gatsby’s funeral, in contrast to his parties, is virtually unattended, although his father arrives from the Midwest, proud of his son’s achievements. Nick is shocked by the way that Gatsby has been deserted by all those who once surrounded him.

**An American Ideal**

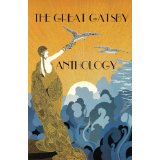
Gatsby, in spite of his flaws, seems to represent an American ideal of hope. This hope is represented by the green light, which Nick sees him gazing at. At the end of the novel Nick refers to Gatsby’s faith in the future whilst he, himself, remains unable to move on. Nick spends two years writing about Gatsby and this shows how he, at least, remained loyal to the 'Great Gatsby'.

If you would like to think about ‘The Great Gatsby’ in new ways, and to read ideas and reflections about it, I would recommend:

**[The Great Gatsby Anthology: Poetry & Prose Inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novel: Volume 11 (Silver Birch Press)](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Great-Gatsby-Anthology-Fitzgeralds-Anthologies/dp/0692427066/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1435325914&sr=8-1&keywords=Great+Gatsby+anthology+silver+birch+press" \o "The Great Gatsby Anthology: Poetry & Prose Inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novel: Volume 11 (Silver Birch Press Anthologies))**

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by Silver Birch Press and Melanie Villines (this can be obtained from Amazon)

[](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Great-Gatsby-Anthology-Fitzgeralds-Anthologies/dp/0692427066/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1435325914&sr=8-1&keywords=Great+Gatsby+anthology+silver+birch+press)