

The bildungsroman form in the great gatsby

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Maturation and personal evolution of main characters typify the bildungsroman, a distinct novelistic form. The growth of characters Tom Buchanan, George Wilson, Jay Gatsby make F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* an important example of the bildungsroman form. Tom Buchanan matures from being a carefree, unfaithful husband to one who realizes the depth of his relationship and concern for his wife. In the opening of the novel, Tom is described as being a "freelance," shameless man: "His acquaintances resented the fact that he turned up in popular restaurants with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about, chatting with whomsoever he knew" (24). Buchanan refers to his mistress as "my girl" (29), rather than referring to his wife as his lady. Only when Buchanan discovers that Daisy has her own relationship with another man – Gatsby – does he recognize the significance of his actions. After finding Daisy and Gatsby kissing in his own home, Buchanan finally acknowledges the pain he has felt: "And if you think I didn't have my share of suffering – look here, when I went to give up that flat... I sat down and cried like a baby... by God it was awful" (179). Buchanan has clearly deepened. Like Buchanan's, George Wilson's evolution has to do with increasing awareness about what is happening with his wife. In the beginning, Wilson is unable – or unwilling – to acknowledge the obvious clues of his wife's disloyalty: "I know...I'm one of these trusting fellas and I don't think any harm to nobody" (158). Both his wife and his friend Tom take advantage of him. When asked about Wilson, Tom says: "Wilson? He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York...he's so dumb he doesn't even know he's alive" (26). When he learns the truth, Wilson is shattered; he even becomes physically sick. Even so, he is

determined to move west to take action against his wife's wrongdoings: " I just got wised up to something funny the last two days...that's why I want to get away" (124). Wilson's decision to move demonstrates his transition from blindness to strength and independence – he is no longer his wife's man, but his own. Finally, Jay Gatsby undergoes a dramatic change as his dreams of reliving the past are broken and replaced by reality. As a poor boy from North Dakota, James Gatz was determined to make it big and distance himself from a poor farming life. During his military service in World War I, Gatsby falls in love with a woman named Daisy. He states: " I can't describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport...Well, there I was, way off my ambitions, getting deeper in love every minute" (150). However, James was unable to maintain the relationship because of his financial instability: " He had certainly taken her under false pretenses.... he let her believe that he was fully able to take care of her...as a matter of fact, he had no such facilities" (149). From this point on, Gatsby is determined to succeed and win back Daisy. He transitions to manhood through his acquaintance with Dan Cody, who teaches Jay the inner workings of " business arrangements" – i. e. the bootlegging that makes Jay a fortune. Gatsby purchases a palace directly across from the residence of his lost love and, with the help of Nick and Jordan, finally meets Daisy again. Although their reunion is memorable, Fitzgerald's use of the broken clock not only symbolizes Gatsby's mission to bring back lost time but also foreshadows his eventual failure. Also symbolic is the contrast between West Egg and East Egg. Nick describes the Eggs as being almost completely opposite from each other except for the fact that they are physically similar. This is significant

because it displays the “ incompatibility” of Gatsby and Daisy as Jay, who lives in West Egg, desires Daisy, who lives in East Egg. Throughout the novel, Gatsby is so engulfed in his fantasy that he refuses to believe the presumption that Daisy and Tom were in love. He demonstrates his denial at the Plaza Hotel, for instance, stating in reference to the love between Tom and Daisy that “ In any case...it was just personal” (152). Through all of these occurrences and his failed attempts to relive the past he so desired, Gatsby finally goes through a momentous character change moments before his death. Nick states, “ I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn’t believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true, he must have felt that he had lost the old world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (161). In the end, James Gatz finally realizes the even he, with all of his material wealth, cannot relive what is already lost. Three of Fitzgerald’s main characters undergo dramatic changes as they find the seriousness that makes them men. Fitzgerald’s classic work is thus an important example of the bildungsroman form.