

Echoes of Byronism in *The Great Gatsby* by

Francis Scott Fitzgerald

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Abstract

The study endeavors to highlight echoes of Byronism in Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*. F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered representative of his era but this study carves his niche beyond time and age. The research traces the common thread of aesthetics in Fitzgerald and Byron through *The Great Gatsby* and also marks its evolution through the novel's textual analysis to mark the predominant traces of Byronic features embedded in the subtext. It specifically focuses on the characterization, symbolism, and imagery of the book to archive evident streaks of Byronism. Furthermore, the study aims to establish the stance that the two writers meet at a common juncture of philosophy.

Key words: *Aesthetics, Byronism, Culture Hero, Lost Generation, Philosophy*

Introduction

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, an American literary icon of the 1920s is an eminent short-story writer and novelist. His works are considered to be most illustrative of the 'Jazz Age', a term he devised himself. Fitzgerald's writings embody the ambience of the Jazz culture; however, his works are not confined to documenting the ethos of America in the 1920s. This study traces echoes of Byronism in his novel, *The Great Gatsby*.

Lord George Gordon Byron, an English poet, who belongs to the second generation of the Romantic poets created his own personal ideology – Byronism. Byronism is defined as a phenomenon, "a set of traits supposedly characterizing Byron's texts" (Elfenbein 9) or his prototype character modeled after his name, the Byronic hero. The Byronic hero first occurrence is found in the author's semi-autobiographical epic narrative poem, "Childe

Harold's Pilgrimage”.

Byronism may have initiated in Byron's works; since then it has recurred in literature. “Byronism is a nineteenth-century cultural phenomenon that changed significantly the relationship between author, text, and audience and whose echoes resonated well beyond the customary sphere of influence of British culture” (Schneider). The study applies the idea given by Lord Byron during the Romantic age in an American novel, almost a hundred years after the initiation of the Byronic hero and other Byronic aspects.

Byronic features are superimposed in Fitzgerald's text irrespective of two completely different literary eras. Fitzgerald belonged to the times of carefree madness of the 1920s while Byron was a rebel amongst the Romantic poets. The 1920s, often referred as the Jazz Age, saw variations in lifestyle and technological advancements that modernized the American life towards the end of the World War I. *The Great Gatsby* is an autobiographical novel in certain ways. Toni Friedrich observed in his essay entitled, “Society and its loss of Values” that Fitzgerald incorporated his own yearnings and lost hopes as well as the lifestyle of the “roaring twenties” is incorporated in the novel (5).

In tracing the conjoint philosophy in the works of two writers, it is impossible to ignore their inherent attributes as writers. Both writers assimilated the pathos and triumph of their personal lives and manifested them in their respective works. Critics often regard Fitzgerald's life to have overshadowed his works as he became an “archetypal figure” himself or a “covey of archetypes; prince charming, the drunken writer, the spoiled genius” (Brucoli 19). Fitzgerald created a legend for himself and is referred to as a “hero” with “many flaws, but a hero nevertheless” in the Preface of the book by the critic, Brucoli (10). Lord Byron too carved his personain his works, which was so dominant that his hero was named after his legend, the Byronic hero. Critics have commented that his personality

cult often overshadowed his works. This study discovers the common traits of this autobiographical hero of both these writers in *The Great Gatsby*.

F. Scott Fitzgerald is distinguished from his contemporaries in the way he portrayed the spirit of the “the lost generation”, a term coined by Gertrude Stein (qtd. in Grawe 42) through *The Great Gatsby*, which was also an expression of disillusionment. While Hemingway adapted to the “Iceberg Theory” in his writings (Grawe 39), Fitzgerald’s writings are more animated with its symbolism and use of colour imagery. Hemingway’s “Iceberg Theory” is the deliberate omission of detail; one-eighth of it being above water like an iceberg, while the reader must decipher the unsaid meaning on his own (Grawe 39). In contrast, Fitzgerald’s writings are more dynamic in expression. His works encapsulates the American Dream and examines the repercussions of this exaggerated dream through his flamboyant writing style.

This article attempts to highlight the impact of the Byronic hero as a “culture hero” and elucidates why the archetype, image, or representation of this prototype character continues to recur and / or evolves in Fitzgerald’s work. The novel, *The Great Gatsby* has proved to be Fitzgerald's most consummate novel, and was an immediate critical success; however, analyzing the Byronic streaks in this book gives it a whole new dimension, and it opens novel avenues for further research.

Literature Review

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, a “symbol of Jazz Age” and an eponym of the “Roaring twenties” (Gale 9) chronicled the change in social attitudes during the 1920s in his works. This study employs Byronism as a tool to scrutinize Fitzgerald’s novel, *The Great Gatsby* and examines it under a Byronic perspective, showing how two celebrated authors writing about two different eras correspond in their concept.

There has been substantial criticism on Fitzgerald and specifically *The Great Gatsby*.

Critics have delved into its mark as a representative American text and a period piece that captures the euphoric period in American history right before the great depression, while paradoxically being a universal text, which reflects any age having characters that become emblematic of human nature in general in any time. *The Great Gatsby's* protagonist is an iconic character emerging from the 1920s, but the characterisation does not bind the content to one era or state. Caldecot Chubb wrote, "There is something of Jay Gatsby in every man, woman or child that ever existed" (18). While Gilbert Seldes, another critic in the Introduction of his case study observed, "Fitzgerald has ceased to content himself to a satiric report on the outside of American life and has with considerable irony attacked the spirit underneath, and so has begun to report on life in its most general terms" (18). This universal aspect is apparent in both the text, as a work of fiction, as well as the characters, particularly the hero.

"*The Great Gatsby* is somehow a commentary on that elusive phrase, the American dream", comments Marius Bewley (125). *The Great Gatsby* evokes the atmosphere and the distinctive mood of Jazz-age, the pursuit of the American dream, and addresses the larger questions of diminishing conventional standards in the face of cumulative materialism and skepticism. The book critically looks at the promise of the American Dream. Fitzgerald depicted the American dream as an "American Nightmare" according to Lathbury (qtd in Malkmes 47). He is also credited for being the most representative of the Jazz Age, as Lathbury emphasizes that the "Jazz Age is impossible to talk apart from Fitzgerald". Fitzgerald became the Jazz Age's eponymous (qtd in Malkmes 46). Lathbury further emphasizes that Fitzgerald's fiction "idealizes and satirizes – something at the same time – the optimism" (qtd in Malkmes 47).

Fitzgerald's writings also reflect the immorality and purposelessness of the Lost Generation post World War I. 'Lost Generation', in general, is a term used to refer to a group

of artists and writers and more specifically a group of American writers who settled in Europe in the wake of First World War in the 1920s. The term branches from an observation made by Gertrude Stein to Ernest Hemingway, which is also quoted in his critical essay, “You are all a lost generation” (42). This insinuates the mass disillusionment caused in the post war generation. Some distinguished members of the Lost Generation include F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, and Ezra Pound. Hemingway used the aforementioned statement as the epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel that captures the attitudes of alcohol consumption, fast-living set of disillusioned young expatriates who relocated in Paris after the war. Toni Friedrich comments that *The Great Gatsby* recapitulates the “common adventures” and “common attitudes” of the Lost Generation (3). In an article “Scott Fitzgerald, Author, Dies at 44” published in the *New York Times*, Fitzgerald’s life and writings are quoted to have exemplified “all the sad young men of the post-war generation” (*New York Times*).

Fitzgerald, an expatriate himself, raises questions of disillusionment in his text, *The Great Gatsby*. At the surface level, the subject of the war seems only indirectly touched upon in the novel. However, Toni Friedrich states that a deeper examination indicates that the entire “story hinges upon the background of the war” and tactfully encompasses the repercussions of the war (4).

According to the critical reception of Fitzgerald’s art of characterization, he lends a great deal of analytical power in the hands of the reader to draw their own conclusions about his characters. Critics have pronounced that Fitzgerald’s approach of characterization is “from the lens of a moving camera” which is described as “analogous to the objectivity method” (Kundu 129). The narrative of *The Great Gatsby* unravels through the voice of an omniscient narrator who establishes his sense of objectivity in the commencing lines of the book. In essence, it reflects the objectivity of the writers’ character illustrations. His

characters reveal themselves as archetypes of his age, while managing to stand solid as individual figures with some unique attributes. According to Tobias Bumm, Fitzgerald's characterization branches into three straightforward divisions, the first being the "complete romantic" and a believer of the American dream. The second is "the voice of the author who's conscious of the all the developments America has gone through in history". The third character profile is "the golden girl" (25). His works encapsulate the gist of these hallmark characters.

Critics have inspected symbolism extensively in F. Scott Fitzgerald's works. He is, in fact considered an author who is distinguished for his use of symbolism in literature. Fitzgerald's book *The Side of Paradise* is considered, "symbol of symbols" as illustrated by Jackson R. Bryer (39). Richard Lehan terms *The Great Gatsby* as a novel with "compressed symbolism" (31). The author uses numerous objects as cryptograms; such as the clock, T. J. Eckelburg's eyes, the valley of ashes, etc, in the text to give meaningful existence to these entities but the most crucial symbolic value is held by colours in this book.

Julia Deitermann writes, "The most significant symbolism applied in the text is colour symbolism" (2). The most prominent colours to gain an insight to the book are "green, white, grey, blue and yellow." Symbolism has been designated as the most powerful device to gain awareness "into a character's personality and revealing ideas, values and profundity" in *The Great Gatsby* as illustrated by Deitermann (2). *The New York Times* noted that the most essential image in *The Great Gatsby* is the "color green". It is recognized as the "color of America, Fitzgerald tells us, when the Dutch first landed here; the color of money" (Cohen n. pag).

Fitzgerald profiles the American society in this novel. Deitermann writes that he "represents the hopelessness of the Jazz Age as an era of innocence lost through that triumph of evil over good" (5). The author passively targets the hypocrisy of aristocratic class, the

clash of old versus new money, intolerance of “non-white immigration” and the class stature of the elite in *The Great Gatsby*. The concept of society consisting of “smug complacency coupled with individualism” is also an intricate part of the subject matter (Deitermann 5).

Fitzgerald’s treatment of the text is the modern rendition of Lord Byron’s notions in his works where he mocks the English society. *The Great Gatsby* is a story that revolves around the character of Jay Gatsby who comes out as the Byronic hero and the sufferer at the end of the narrative. Jonathan David Gross points out, “Other characteristics’ of the Byronic hero are an energetic spirit, a rebellious individualism, and a vast capacity for feeling and suffering” (75). Atara Stein illustrates the characteristics of a Byronic hero; “The Byronic hero, with his ambition, aspiration, aggressive individualism and “Promethean spark” was alive and flourishing in the latter half of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries” (1).

There is generous criticism on Fitzgerald’s protagonist, Jay Gatsby. He has been shown as the centripetal force of the novel. As a reader we are able to decipher from the title of the book that there is something ‘great’ about Gatsby. For instance, the third chapter of the book builds a mysterious aura around his character before he first appears in the book. The author uses the zoom-in technique to establish a kaleidoscopic view of the parties hosted at the protagonist’s mansion, transitioning from the “music from my neighbor’s house through the summer nights” to the “crates of oranges and lemons arrived ...” (30). The lexical field of opulence has been employed to establish a visual image of grandeur associated with the Byronic Hero. The effect is amplified with references to “Rolls-Royce”, “an extra gardener”, fruits arriving from a certain fruiterer in New York, and “real brass rail”, “gins and liquors and cordials”. Through imagery, the author evokes the imagination of the reader as the narrative delves into the description of the “neighbor’s garden” through a pattern of auditory and visual tropes. Rhythm has been established

through the mention of “orchestra” and the “whisperings and the champagne and the stars”

The “blue gardens” creates an opulent appeal to the narrative with the reflection of the water body close to it, “the motorboats split the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam.” (34). It is a reference to the kinetic movement that renders an image of motion indicating the fast paced motorboat and its speed that splits the water into two. The exponential flux of these parties is encapsulated through a web of auditory and visual images. With the usage of literary devices such as similes (“like moths' ") and the mention of “omnibus”, “crates” and numerical references, quantity has been emphasized in the text. “Pyramids of pulpless halves' " are also alliterative of the plentitude being represented. With consistent usage of the high frequency word and conjunction, “and”, a sense of accumulation and continuation has been established while discussing Gatsby’s wealth and opulence. The mention of the “drawing of the aquaplanes”, “(the splitting) of the waters” and the “omnibus bearing parties to and from the city” allow for the visualization of movement and contribute to the emerging dynamics of the Jazz Age.

Many critics of *The Great Gatsby* believe that he is a hero, with whom the reader sympathizes, despite his dark secrets. Giles Mitchell records in the essay entitled “The Great Narcissist: A study of Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby” that many critics including John Chambers considers that Jay Gatsby “has a vitality and potential for intense happiness” (91).

Analyzing Gatsby’s nuances and behavior in the light of Byronism, an intriguing sphere for research is initiated. Gatsby may appear the “mythical character not only because he is impersonalized to be the Romantic impulse crystallized in the term, American dream but also because Gatsby offers a parallel to the embryonic path of the mythic hero” (Seshachari 28). Furthermore, he believes that *The Great Gatsby* marks the pinnacle of Fitzgerald’s charactersiation, especially in its weaving of mythopoeic

inferences and use of mythic symbols. Seshachari emphasizes in her essay, “The Great Gatsby: Apogee of Fitzgerald’s Mythopoeia” that *The Great Gatsby* is “remarkable for its multi-level mythic interpretation that it suggests” (27). The protagonist is an “idealized, larger than life but flawed character” and sometimes referred to as a “mythical figure” (Thorslev 187). Thus, the character of Jay Gatsby is examined from the Byronic perspective.

There is extensive criticism on *The Great Gatsby* being a period piece and Fitzgerald being a representative of the Jazz age. *The New York Times* noted, “elusive Gatsby, the cynical idealist” as landmark fictional character who “embodies America in all of its messy glory” (Cohen). Correspondingly, critics have written how the Byronic Hero has evolved in Literature. This paper employs Byronism as an instrument to give a novel perspective to this book. It aims to draw connections through the study of motives and symbols, as well as trace the pattern of images that is evident in the sub text.

Research Methodology

The research employs textual analysis as a research method. It constitutes both, intra-textual and inter-textual references; this research aims at developing a deep understanding of the novel, *The Great Gatsby* through a close reading. One of the limitations of research was the lack of availability of any criticism on the works of Fitzgerald through a Byronic lens. However, within the confines of availability of criticism on Byron and Byronism, the topic of research has been comprehensively examined. The criticism which helped in validating echoes of Byronism in Fitzgerald include: ‘*Jay Gatsby – Major Literary Characters*’ edited by Harold Bloom, ‘*The Roaring Twenties - Historical Circumstances of “The Great Gatsby”*’ by Toni Friedrich and ‘*Don Juan - Moby Classics*’ by Lord Byron. These secondary sources are consulted to explore the characterization, symbolism, and imagery in *The Great Gatsby* and Byronism and the evolution of its philosophy.

Discussion and Analysis

Byronic echoes are apparent in various aspects of the text including the characterization, setting, and the mood created by the use of recurrent images and symbols. The most prominent resonances of Byronism are evident in Fitzgerald's characterization in *The Great Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby, the titular character of the book is an emblem of the Byronic hero. The Byronic hero is a unique character type introduced by Byron. The hero takes after the name of Lord Byron because it evolved primarily due to Lord Byron's writing in the nineteenth century. The first instance of the Byronic hero manifests in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The poem lays the characteristics of the hero (Cora 163). Following stanza demonstrates some key traits of the said character:

V. For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,
Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
Had sighed to many, though he loved but one,
And that loved one, alas, could ne'er be his.
Ah, happy she! to 'scape from him whose kiss
Had been pollution unto aught so chaste;
Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,
And spoiled her goodly lands to gild his waste,
Nor calm domestic peace had ever deigned to taste (Byron 1545).

As evident from the aforementioned verses, the Byronic hero is portrayed as a dissident who does not conform to the society or its expectations; the hero is who perceived

as world-weary. Pascall states, “Macaulay was one of the first to describe the archetypal Byronic hero, in a review of 1831: “a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance on his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection” (89). Thorslev argues that the Byronic hero is an assimilation of the “Gothic Villain” and the “Man of Feeling”; his past is precarious which he borrows from the Gothic Villain, and his “tender sensibilities and in his undying fidelity to the woman he loves—but he is more than these: he is also a Romantic rebel.”(6).

On the surface, Jay Gatsby is a man whose shocking wealth, sketchy business dealings, and questionable background make him both fascinating and repulsive. The people at his parties are glad to partake of his riches. However, conjecture revolves around his persona and business and he is the center of their grapevine. The speculation is evident when one of the guests at his lustrous party accuses him of being a murderer without any substantial evidence; “You look at him sometimes when he thinks nobody's looking at him. I'll bet he killed a man” (Fitzgerald 38). His lavish parties at the mansion are infiltrated with speculation and conjecture about the host. This sense of mystery is a large part of the public persona of Gatsby; people are intrigued by him, but few find out what is at the core of this enigma. It is evident through the authorial comment in the novel, “It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world” (38). One of the archetype makings of a Byronic hero is the mystery that surrounds him. Fitzgerald, by building Gatsby's character around mystery and wonder, gives him a distinctive Byronic feature. Fitzgerald vividly describes the speculation that followed Gatsby, when the crowd in his luxurious party “was agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity” (36). Gatsby's guests afflict a plethora of accusations on his character in low voices from calling him a “German spy” in World War I to a murderer (Fitzgerald 36). It is significant to note that the

narrator's tone is not judgmental during the course of his narrative. People feast on Gatsby's wealth; yet leave no stone unturned to accuse him of black money. The author sheds light on the hypocrisy of American society through his subtle narrative technique and empowers the reader to draw his own conclusion. Byron also captures the English society's hypocritical attitude in his poem, "Lara"; "The general rumour ignorantly loud / The mystery dearest to the curious crowd" (303). These verses by Byron are harmonious to Gatsby's luxurious parties in the novel, whereby people pass condescending remarks for Jay Gatsby because they don't possess authentic knowledge of Gatsby's business.

Fitzgerald builds the mystery around Gatsby from the beginning of the novel. The reader hears of Gatsby from the narrator and different characters from the onset of the book; however Gatsby's character materializes after a certain period in the novel. Fitzgerald deliberately delays the introduction of the novel's most important figure - Gatsby himself - until the beginning of the third chapter. This technique aids in creating the mystic ambience created around the central character. Element of mystery is a crucial feature in the signature hero of Byron. Byron manifests this attribute through 'Manfred'; his titular Byronic hero of the poem, "Manfred", in which the poet says: "The mystery of thy making was reveal'd" (516). He also establishes the sense of mystery in his poem, "The Corsair" when he categorizes the Byronic hero as "The man of loneliness and mystery" (282).

Rendering Thorslev's analysis of this hero, we understand that the Byronic hero does not possess 'heroic virtue' in the usual sense; instead, he has many dark qualities (189). The protagonist of *The Great Gatsby* is looked upon with skepticism due to his shady lifestyle. It is significant to note that Gatsby has invented his persona; it never came naturally to him. When we meet him, Jay Gatsby is a man abundant wealth, a lot of acquaintances, and few friends; the rumors that circulate around him make him to be some kind of mysterious superhero or super villain. The narrator (Nick) creates his mythic aura by saying, "he came

alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor (69). Accordingly, the same attribute is traced in Byron's signature hero, Frances Wilson marks in his essay, "Byron, Byronism and Byromaniacs"; "Lord Byron lent his name to the scornful, despairing and the burdened hero of the nineteenth century" (132). Nick Carraway, the self-proclaimed objective narrator of *The Great Gatsby* comments in the novel, "Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (Fitzgerald 2). Hence, the lead character of *The Great Gatsby* holds utmost semblance with Lord Byron's characteristic hero.

The Byronic hero is usually "isolated from society as a wanderer or is in exile of some kind" (Thorslev 186). It does not matter whether this "social separation is imposed upon him by some external force or is self-imposed" (Thorslev 187). Gatsby, despite throwing lavish parties with hundreds of people, dies alone. Nick Carraway vehemently points out that towards the end, Gatsby stood alone when he says, "I found myself on Gatsby's side, and alone." (131). He is emoted as an isolated figure in the midst of a crowd. His isolation can be felt by the reader when the narrator says, "A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell" (Fitzgerald 47).

Byron's Manfred, a character who wandered desolate mountaintops, was physically isolated from society, whereas Childe Harold chose to "exile" himself and wander throughout Europe. Although Harold remained physically present in society and among people, he was not by any means "social." (Thorslev 189). Likewise, Gatsby is shown to be isolated in *The Great Gatsby* on various instances. Fitzgerald writes, "Eyes fell on Gatsby, standing alone on the marble steps" (43). Analogous concept is evident in Byron's poetry for his distinguished hero. For instance, here in the poem, "Lara" Byron explains how his Hero is a stranger in a crowd and a captive of his own isolation. He writes, "He stood a stranger in this breathing world/ an erring spirit from another hur'led." (290). Moreover, Byron writes in the chapter

“Character and Description” that the Byronic hero often “suffers from an exile”, either physical or mental (n. pag). In this case, Gatsby has imposed a social exile on himself. He throws massive parties but tries to keep a low profile in them, finds himself alone in the vicinity of his gatherings. Lord Byron marks the solitary attitude of the Byronic figure in his poem, “The Siege of Corinth”: “He stood alone among the host”, “He stood alone amidst his band” and also “While he alone, where thousands pass’d” (316). These verses shed light on the intensity of loneliness that is a hallmark of the Byronic hero.

Lord Byron, according to Thorslev, is considered “the one poet in the Romantic Movement whose hero was his poetry, or whose poetry existed for his hero” (4). Byron portrayed his hero to be “larger than life,” states Atara Stein tracing the evolution of this hero in media in his book, *The Byronic Hero in Film, Fiction, and Television* (106). Scott Fitzgerald embodies this larger than life character in Jay Gatsby. As Nick Carraway points out, “there was something gorgeous about him” (Fitzgerald 2). He also describes Gatsby’s persona with, “some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life,” and an “extraordinary gift for hope” (Fitzgerald 2). Gatsby’s wealth augments his overall image of greatness. In chapter three the author goes at length to describe the enormity of his “mansion” and his parties as almost unbelievably luxurious. Fitzgerald builds Gatsby’s persona through a series of symbols and gestures. For instance when he says, “signed - Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand” (36). The author describes Gatsby’s smile as one of those “rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, which you may come across four or five times in life” (Fitzgerald 41). Gatsby’s car is illustrated as “gorgeous” by Fitzgerald (52) and when Gatsby moves his hand it is marked by the author as if “his right hand had suddenly ordered divine retribution to stand by” (53). These grand gestures allude to his gorgeous being and larger than life character.

Dinesh D’souza comments that Gatsby’s life is “a reminder of the astonishment and

wonder with the first Dutch sailors beheld the world, a world that signals the fulfillment of the last and greatest of all human beings” (189). The omniscient narrator associates this inherent greatness with Gatsby’s character. In chapter six he illustrates Gatsby’s demeanor, “The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that” (Fitzgerald 79).

Fitzgerald’s treatment of the text is the modern rendition of Lord Byron’s notions in his works where he mocks the English society and epitomizes his hero. Jay Gatsby comes out as the sufferer towards the end. His suffering lies in the fact that he is stuck in his past. Fitzgerald intensely alludes to his suffering while describing Gatsby as he “looked around him vividly as if past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand” (73). Jonathan David Gross points out, “Other characteristics’ of the Byronic hero are an energetic spirit, a rebellious individualism, and a vast capacity for feeling and suffering” (75). While tracing this Byronic tint in Gatsby, we realize that Gatsby’s fatal error is his unconditional love and illusion of Daisy. Fitzgerald states that Gatsby “paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (Fitzgerald 126). Daisy exists on two levels, firstly the real Daisy and on the other she exists as Gatsby’s illusion of her, and at the end she “stumbled sort of his dreams” (Fitzgerald 78). Gatsby’s illusion of Daisy is his apparition of a woman from his past who loved her, her existence is nothing more than a dream in existence. The author refers to this dream as the “dead dream” when Daisy “draws further and further” into her actual being and away from Gatsby’s illusion (109). Lord Byron captures the gist of this illusion significant to the Byronic hero in his poem, “Lara” in the verse: “His early dreams of good outstripp’d the truth” (290). Likewise, Gatsby’s illusion of Daisy fell short of her real existence. The fault however is not Daisy’s, it is “because of the colossal vitality of his dreams” (Fitzgerald 78). Jay Gatsby is self-destructive and it serves as

his tragic flaw.

One of the crucial attributes of Byronism is the “self-destructive hero” and Gatsby is classified as one in American literature (Stein 20).

Symbolism and Imagery with Byronic resonances

The imagery used in *The Great Gatsby* is extensive and its most prominent constituent is the colour imagery. Various colours repeatedly used create a network of interconnected images in the subtext that runs parallel to the plot that gives insight into various characters, their moods and nuances of behavior. Such images also succeed in creating an ambience accentuated with Byronic overtones in the novel.

The colour ‘green’ is significant in this regard because it allows more knowledge into the protagonist’s character. ‘Green’ is associated with Gatsby’s ‘hopes and desire’ that make him struggle to win Daisy’s affection. However, the colour green also denotes the money in the upper class as well as reveals the discrepancy between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ money. In the novel, Gatsby addresses Daisy; “You always have a green light that burns towards the end of your dock” (76). Situated at the end of Daisy’s East Egg dock and barely visible from Gatsby’s West Egg lawn, the green light represents Gatsby’s dreams for the future.

Gatsby’s earlier part of the relationship with Daisy is etched with the symbolism of green light; their courtship, where it all began. He is shown to reach out towards the green light in the darkness as a guiding light to lead him. Gatsby’s quest for Daisy is in parallel with his pursuit of the American dream. Nick, the narrator, likens the green light to how America, rising out of the ocean, must have appeared to early settlers of the new nation. Nick says, “Involuntarily I glance seaward, and distinguish nothing except a single green light” (21). The use of green colour to manifest hope is extensively present in Byron’s poetry; the poet uses the colour green to symbolize hope, repeatedly in his poetry. In “Hours of Idleness”, he writes:

“The green sparkles bright with a tear” (47). The poet highlights how hope sparkles in the midst of the tribulations of the world. In the poem, “The Giaour”, Byron refers to the green colour again, “An emir by his garb of green” (266) the poet explains how green is the privileged colour of the prophets and an emblem of faith and hope. This is a common image used to carve the central enigma of a Byronic hero.

There are numerous occasions where colour green has been alluded to, to hint at Gatsby’s ‘new’ money, further intensifying his black money and black business. This, in turn is an insight into another Byronic trait which is the dark side of the hero. Gatsby’s dark side is his black business and his links in Chicago. Hence, the colour green acts as a symbol that sheds light on some prominent Byronic shades. Fitzgerald uses “green sound” (93), “green leather of the seat” (97), “his face was green” (99), “green and lavender” (75), “green tickets” (143) and green leather conservatory (53) in the novel. The extensive use of colour green also highlights Gatsby’s envy towards people belonging to Daisy’s class, specially her husband, Tom Buchanan. All his life, Gatsby strived to belong to her class to seek her affections. The desire within him is denoted uniquely with the green hues in the book.

Correspondingly, Byron uses significant amount of visual imagery and the colour green in his works, such as in the poem, Pilgrimage; “Whose green, wild margin now no more erase” (69) and also, “Along his margin, a more eloquent green” (45). Likewise, Byron manifests the vigor and desire of his emblematic hero through ‘green’ imagery in his poetry.

The colour green also symbolizes the growth, nature and spring, when associated with Gatsby’s desire of a new world. The interpretation highlights Fitzgerald’s criticism on the society of the American dream and the 1920’s. In critical opinion, 1920’s were only shaped for a longing for success, money and wealth while moral and social values went through a decline. Byronism translates this moral decadence in the English society in many of Byron’s works. Therefore, the common weaving thread is the universal undertone of dying morality

in the works of these two writers.

The “valley of ashes” is another recurrent image in *The Great Gatsby* that is symbolic of the moral decadence in society (23). It exists between West Egg and New York City and comprises of a long stretch of uninhabited land created by the depositing of industrial ashes. It represents the moral and social degeneration that results from the wanton pursuit of wealth, as the rich indulge themselves with regard for nothing but their own pleasure. The valley of ashes also represents the predicament of the proletariat, like George Wilson, who lives among the dirty ashes and loses their vivacity as a consequence. It also serves as the constant reminder of Gatsby’s past and his reality. Gatsby did not belong to a rich class by birth and he spends his entire life attaining that social status. He builds a new world for himself but can never escape from the reality. The valley of ashes is categorized to be “grotesque” (Fitzgerald 140), “desolate area of land” and Nick and his friends have to cross this “bleak” land every time they travel through the Eggs and the city (23). The valley of ashes is illustrative of the American idealism and spirituality corrupted by material possessions and wealth. Fitzgerald comments:

This is a valley of ashes--a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight. (Fitzgerald 23)

The colour ‘grey’ represents dullness, a loss of hope, or lack of happiness in life. It also represents the waning of hues of blue, which means the fading of dreams. It is the critical

description of the 'valley of ashes'. The references of this colour is observed throughout Fitzgerald's text, "grey little villages in France" (31); "grey windows disappeared" at Gatsby's house (91) and "... a grey, florid man with a hard, empty face" (74) describing the portrait of Dan Cody on display in Gatsby's bedroom. His ideal is shown to be in the image of grey and empty. The Wilsons, who reside in the valley of ashes, also appear in grey clothes, except for Myrtle, when she enjoys the company of Tom Buchanan to show the contrast. Wilson is shown to be "mingling immediately with the cement color of the walls. A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity – except his wife, who moved close to Tom" (25). Myrtle's lack of grey hues in the presence of Tom Buchanan denotes that it is her only escape from the ashes. The trope of colours and its pattern indicates its association to mundane objects and descriptions. The grey, in this denotes to the constant feeling of despair felt by Jay Gatsby, synonymous to the featured hero of Lord Byron. The character of Childe Harold is portrayed as doomed character with melancholic existence; Byron refers to this Byronic hero as "So doomed the Childe" (qtd. in Thorslev 130). Moreover, the element of despair is also palpable in the poem, "The Prophecy of Dante". Byron says that the hero "Succumbs to long infection, and despair" (68).

Sometimes Gatsby comes up with the color pink, e.g., "the luminosity of his pink suit under the moon" (115). The 'pink suit' represents Gatsby's intense desire to acquire Daisy's affections. When Gatsby and Daisy are finally together, "there was a pink and golden billow of foamy clouds above the sea" (114). Pink is customarily a color associated with femininity, love or affection in literature. In the context of this book, pink emanates the sheer love Gatsby possess for Daisy. It also underlines how fickle Daisy's sensitivity is towards pink or Gatsby's strong sense of passion for her. Venessa Mangione writes that the "Byronic philosophy sees love as the ultimate, and only essential truth" that exists in life (14). The very foundation of love in Byronism is the failure and forgetting what is possible (Mangione 14).

The Byronic hero is regarded as a fatal lover and a noble outlaw in love. Gatsby takes the blame for the car accident for Daisy Buchanan, his love is unconditional and proves to be fatal to his life eventually.

Fitzgerald keeps the momentum of colours dominant in *The Great Gatsby*; another use of colour is 'red' which is generally associated with joy, love, shame, and rage. The inside of Buchanan's home is described in red; "We walked through a high hallway into a bright rosy-coloured space" (11); "Inside, the crimson room bloomed with light" (18). The crimson shade symbolizes strong emotions, or things of strong emotions rather than intellectual ideas such as love in Gatsby's case.

Venessa Mangione, in her essay "Lord Byron's Descendants" believes that the "Byronic hero in its entirety by definition can never be redeemed from becoming a couple; he is interminably thrown back upon black despair" (14). He never gets the opportunity to be redeemed or fulfilled by his true love. He is inherently a melancholic figure who experiences the death of his love. Red thus symbolizes the danger, passion, and aggression of this hero. Moreover, Mangione states that the Byronic hero nears his success and then fails. Jay Gatsby almost cajoles Daisy into falling in love with him, but Tom Buchanan is much more persuasive and aware of Daisy in the true essence, hence, he accomplishes to coax her into staying with him and his life. Gatsby's passion and love for Daisy is of such magnitude that when it dawns upon him that he can never attain what he aspired, he takes his own life. Byron encapsulates the passion of this signature hero in his poem "Lara" in the verses: "His mind would have exulted and half regret / With more capacity for love than earth" (299). Therefore, according to Byron, 'to love' is integral to this characteristic hero. He projects his love to be the ultimate goal of his life, harmonious to Gatsby's character in *The Great Gatsby*.

Fitzgerald employs the scarlet descriptions at various instances; "a thin red circle" (129), "shelf in red and gold" (9) and "a cheerful red and white Georgian Colonial

mansion” (10). These references of the ‘red colour’ in the novel indicate the presence of Gatsby’s passion for Daisy Buchanan. Correspondingly, Byron employs this shade in his poem, “Childe Harold's Pilgrimage”; “His angry tail; red rolls his eyes dilated glow” (173). Thus, the colour red illustrates the angry passion in the central hero of Byron’s poem.

Red also signifies the sun: and it’s a symbol of energy, radiating its vitalizing life-force into human beings. Red is also looked upon as a sensual color, and can be associated with man's most profound urges and impulses. Gatsby’s passion can be identified with the intense emotions of the Byronic hero. Byron, in his poem “Lara” emphasizes the identical robust emotions that are also a hallmark of Gatsby’s character in his hero; “And fiery passions that had pour’d their wrath / in hurried desolation ov’r his path” (299).

Colour imagery takes precedence over other images in *The Great Gatsby*. ‘Golden’ hues in the book have several embedded connotations. It signifies “richness”, as well as “happy or prosperous: golden days, golden age”, “and something ‘extremely valuable: a golden’”. At Gatsby’s parties even the turkeys turn to gold, e.g., “Turkeys bewitched to a dark gold” (35). Jordan Baker - the golden girl of golf - is associated with that color, “With Jordan's slender golden arm resting in mine” (37); “I put my arm around Jordan’s golden shoulder” (64). The narrator sheds light at the tempestuous months while Daisy awaits Gatsby during the period of war, “All night the saxophones wailed the hopeless comment of the ‘Beale Street Blues’ while a hundred pairs of golden and silver slippers shuffled the shining dust ...” (96). This denotes the flamboyant lifestyle of the Jazz Age. The use of colour imagery is pronounced while entailing description around Gatsby and his mansion. For instance, the dust in the rooms in his state is depicted in grey, with sheen on it, while the customarily golden tea is served at the grey tea hour. The stark contrast between the hues of golden and grey is also depicted in the scene, “we went about opening the rest of the windows downstairs, filling the house with grey-turning, gold-turning light” (122). This

contrast denotes the existence of Daisy Buchanan on two levels as explained earlier. It also hints at the golden dream of opportunity created by Jay Gatsby in order to accomplish his lost love as oppose to the bleak gray reality of Daisy belonging to the aristocratic class and Gatsby always seen an out-sider by the aristocratic standards. Jay Gatsby never fits in the realms of the hypocritical East eggers.

Fitzgerald's work has Byronic undertones, however; he takes a passive approach in his book while painting the moral decline of the society. Byron, on the other hand, was much more direct and dogmatic in his approach and hence attracted a lot of criticism from his contemporaries and critics. One of the quintessential social concerns in *The Great Gatsby* is the sociologic distribution of wealth; how the millionaires of the 1920s catapulted and benefited from the Great Depression. It also plays on the differences between old and new money. Second, the war seems to be present only in the background but it tore apart the young courting couple of Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan. It actually serves the core reason for the tragedy of love for Gatsby. The superficial life and power hegemony of the rich along with moral decadence are major thematic concerns of *The Great Gatsby*.

All these factors contribute in carving Gatsby's shady past, "he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (83). The Byronic hero is characterized to have a troubled past which makes them either a rebel or an isolated being of the society. Gatsby's unfulfilled love for Daisy and lack of social stature contributed to what he eventually made of himself.

Time is one of the most ubiquitous tropes in *The Great Gatsby*, stitched between situations and characters, slackening and accelerating the momentum of the entire plotline seems hinged on the protagonist's dream. The author refers to time repeatedly to underpin the notion that time is the driving force and the harbinger of change for the Jazz era, and

also for the landscape of United States. Gatsby's tragic demise lies in the fact that he is stuck twenty years before the present time. The narrator concludes the novel by drawing on the motif of Time, "So we beaton, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (144). The concluding sentence of the book "foresees not arrival but retrogression" of Time (McCabe 156). Byron also (time and again refers to this motif in his works. He) encapsulates the power of Time in his poem, "To Time", where referring to its transitory quality he states, "Time! on whose arbitrary wing / The varying hours must flag or fly" (110).

This Valley of Ashes represents the present, the dreadful time where the tragedy of Gatsby unravels—pessimism breeds as all hope obliterates for the protagonist. The revered green light, which is associated with hope and blossoming future for Gatsby is reduced to a mere physical light at the end of Daisy's dock. This can be related to Byron's verse from the poem, "To Time": "The active agony of grief / Retards, but never counts the hour." (110). Byron emphasizes the relationship of Time and grief. According to the poet, the agony will lessen in magnitude; retard in growth, however it will never diminish and the scar shall always remain. Likewise in the novel, for twenty years Jay Gatsby lived in his illusion of 'Time' and tried to recreate the past in vain. Gatsby's agony never diminishes; it only ends with his death. The concept of Gatsby's mind stuck in between 'Time' is best illustrated by Fitzgerald in the verses, "In the meantime / In between time—" (78).

Conclusion

The study celebrates the historical timelessness in literature – a synthesis of past and contemporary in *The Great Gatsby*. It reconnoiters the novel from the lens of a Romantic, and not just any Romantic poet but Lord Byron; a rebel, and traces predominant echoes of Byronism. Although the works of Fitzgerald and Byron are years apart from the first introduction of Lord Byron's Byronic Hero, the investigation of the concept of the Hero,

imagery and symbols demonstrate the presence of Byronic tropes in Fitzgerald's text.

T.S Eliot documents in his seminal text, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that dependability on convention does not necessitate the writer to withdraw novelty and it does not translate to reiteration or repetition. It may also translate to building on an already existing tradition as attempted by Fitzgerald according to the contention of this paper. *The Great Gatsby* did chronicle the change in social attitudes during the 1920s, and alongside it embodies the tradition of Byronism. Thus, Fitzgerald's text is individual and specific to a particular time as well as a text that retains and revives a particular tradition. This 'tradition' according to Eliot cannot be inherited but it can be observed through its historical perspective; "beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order" (47). The writer for instance has acquired a historical sense of the past. Eliot contributes, "This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional" (47). According to this theory Fitzgerald can be categorized as a traditional writer if he fused Byronism in his works. The research incorporates the criticism and how it indicates eminent strands of similarities between the two writers in the context of *The Great Gatsby*. Furthermore, it establishes how autobiographical personality cults of Fitzgerald and Lord Byron gleam through their works; their similarity to one and another. The research thus is significant because it unravels a novel perspective in Fitzgerald's novel and provides new pathways to work on a unique perspective.

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