



Research Article

REFLECTIONS OF JAY GATSBY, THE INVISIBLE PSYCHOANALYTICAL HERO: AN EXPLORATION OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS IN FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY*

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ABSTRACT

Life doesn't go as we always wish so, there are twists and turns, ups and downs that are inevitable. Literature isn't just books or poems; it's a multidisciplinary venture with the essence of life, values and emotions. It has the potential to shape personalities, change the way we perceive and understand the world in a better way. As we are navigating across an unprecedented Covid Pandemic situation, it's a unique experience that tells the importance of being optimistic, hygienic, determinant and concerned of others. Likewise, Gatsby's life helps to seek golden reminders for living an accountable, peaceful and valuable life instead of running away madly behind worldly pleasures. One of the profound psychological theories of the modern world, Psychoanalysis holds a pride of place among contemporary psychological studies. This research paper aims to bring out the Psychoanalytical elements embedded in F Scott Fitzgerald's magnum opus, *The Great Gatsby*. The present research navigates into the representation of the novel's characters, especially Jay Gatsby as the 'psychoanalytical hero' using the research methodology of Freud's psychoanalysis. In the present turbulent society where people fail to understand the value of relationships, Jay Gatsby's character becomes more relevant.

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INTRODUCTION

Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is one of the most remarkable Bildungsroman novels that depict America's social life between the end of the First World War and the Great Depression (1929-1939). First published on April 10, 1925, the novel explores the Jazz Age or 'roaring twenties' generations' adherence to the age's self-destructive moral values and pleasure-seeking lifestyle. The novel, which was an artistic and material success, examines the tragic lives of wealthy and prodigal people in Long Island, New York.

Literary criticism is the scientific and systematic way of understanding, analyzing, interpreting and evaluating a work of art using theory. The word 'theory' comes from the Greek root *theoria*, which means 'contemplation' or 'speculation'. Psychology involves the comprehensive study of the human mind and its processes when applied to literary criticism, helps to reconstruct the inner dynamics of a work of art. During the time humanity puzzled over the functioning of the human mind, Sigmund Freud's insightful Psychoanalytic theory was a revolutionary discourse that unveiled the structure of the human psyche and was a turning point in the arena of literary criticism.

As Pramod K Nair writes in his magnum opus, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism to Ecocriticism*, Psychoanalytical criticism explores the language of the unconscious, the repressed and the hidden as embodied in literary and cultural texts such as art or fiction, with particular attention to the representation of sexuality and desires. Psychoanalytical criticism uncovers the 'subject' of the author as revealed through the images, the language, the codes of her/his work. It asks questions of the author's attempts to conceal her/his desires and drives, and the cultural codes that force her/him to do so. (Nayar 64)

Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby, Daisy Fay Buchanan, Tom, Jordan Baker, George Wilson, and Myrtle Wilson are the novel's main characters. Nick, the narrator of the novel, chooses to hide in the shadow of his sexual phantasies, putting forward a substitute for it, Jay Gatsby. Camouflaged by the title given to the novel Nick narrates, he presents Gatsby recreating his unconscious Oedipal wishes. Jay fits the archetypal mould of 'hopeless romantic' and Daisy to that of 'unfaithful love'. As we see in the novel, Gatsby is torn apart by the tension between the present and the past; it can be interpreted as leading his life in a particular way to forget something sad that had happened to him long ago. We can trace that Gatsby exhibits a masochistic character where he is obsessed with his past, which makes him inferior in all his actions. Gatsby's traumatic experience in his life makes him leading a reserved, lonely and hidden life. Gatsby is a

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character with clear cut narcissistic tendencies. He is proud of himself and boasts of being a self-made man. One of the great failures in Gatsby's life is his relationship with Daisy, and the loss of love leaves a narcissistic scar in his mind. Gatsby deeply wished to be with Daisy, but his belief that this was possible was ultimately nothing but an illusion, which he deeply wanted to be the reality. Gatsby can't let go of the love he had with Daisy five years ago. The romantic hero is constantly trying to relive it and freeze time so he can go back to those moments. He doesn't want to live in the present as it isn't going to help him attain his goals and dreams which this saddens him. 'I think he would acknowledge anything now, without reserve, but he wanted to talk about Daisy'. (Fitzgerald 137)

Freud described dreams as the 'royal road' to the unconscious, arguing that dreams provide us with the best understanding of repressed desires. Dreams are the expressions of repressed desire, which shows us the unconscious. Gatsby is the perfect example. According to Freud, the Oedipal Complex is the source of the repressed desire, and he argues that all desire, repression and anxiety are based on the condition of prohibition, termed as 'taboo'. Freud proposed that the repressed or the unconscious emerges in art, which is best seen in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. The words of Nick on seeing Tom cheating on Daisy with Myrtle is an example of the exhibition of psychoanalysis. 'I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life'. (Fitzgerald 40) Here, Nick is both a participant and an observer in a scene that he does not like. We can understand that Nick is attracted to the excessive larger than life experience of unlimited money and worldly pleasures at the same time, being repelled by the immorality and superficiality of the scene.

According to Sigmund Freud, 'The id is the impulsive part of our psyche which responds directly and immediately to the instincts. The id is not affected by reality, logic or the everyday world. The idea that every wishful impulse should be satisfied immediately, regardless of the consequences'. Freud describes three components of the human psyche, namely the ego, the superego and the id. The ego is the conscious mind which is the source of decision making and rational thought. The superego is the conscience drawn from the social world and cultural codes that influence conscious works. The 'id' is the area of dreams, instincts, desires, commonly called the unconscious.

Realization of self happens in three phases; the need phase, the demand phase and the mirror phase. Gatsby makes no effort to distance himself from the dark rumours that circulate him, and he attempts to behave in ways that are attractive to others. Nick presents Gatsby as a 'strange' character. Gatsby has 'fear of abandonment' caused due to 'low self-esteem' and 'unstable sense of self'. The lack of love he experienced during his childhood and loss of love is the root cause of abandonment. The 'abandonment' can be 'physical or sense of emotional distance' when someone feels alone and understands no one cares for him. In the below lines taken from the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud explains the dreams that act as the mind's wish fulfilment. What is common in all these dreams is obvious. They completely satisfy wishes excited during the day, which remain unrealized. They are simply and undisguised realizations of wishes. (www.lminyoga.com)

The concept of 'dreams as wish fulfilment' is manifested in Gatsby's character with its displacement in his dreams, and his dreams are not affected or influenced by common sense. Gatsby's 'id' or 'unconsciousness' throws luxurious parties in the objectives of attracting Daisy. Gatsby's weekend parties are attempts to attract the 'object of desire'; in other words, 'it is nothing more than shimmering nets thrown out in the hopes of snaring ... Daisy.' (www.huronmediacenter.org) The below mentioned lines presents the idea that everything Gatsby possessed was meant for his love Daisy.

He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real. (Fitzgerald 88)

The novel *The Great Gatsby* highlights the cultural rift between East and West explores the national myth, the 'American Dream'. The great American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson in his treatise 'Self Reliance', formulated the American Dream's basic principles in the mid-19th century. But in the early 20th century, when North Eastern America grew rich in wealth and industrial power, the dream took on a purely materialistic nature. Fitzgerald exposes this corruption of dream with Gatsby's projection, which symbolises the vulgar pursuit of wealth and social privilege. On the other hand, its very painful that he portrayed all the female characters in 'low light' throughout the novel.

Interestingly, most of the guests do not know much about the host; moreover, the host Gatsby never drank or joined in the revels. Gatsby's headstrong attitude can be analyzed as his 'id' ruling over the 'superego'. Gatsby faces this psychological trauma as he is afraid of losing a romantic partner. Gatsby's 'id' works mostly in the novel with his dreams and desires, superseding his 'ego' and 'superego'. Gatsby is the paradigmatic example for 'repression', the cornerstone of psychoanalytical theory. The process through which certain desires, especially sexual and pushing it into the unconsciousness as they do not influence our daily lives, and the conscious mind is 'repression'. Gatsby's feelings about Daisy are repressed, and it naturally comes out of the 'unconscious.'

"I can't describe to you how surprised I was to find out I loved her, old sport. I even hoped for a while that she'd throw me over, but she didn't, because she was in love with me too. She thought I knew a lot because I knew different things from her... Well, there I was, 'way off my ambitions, getting deeper in love every minute, and all of a sudden I didn't care. What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling her what I was going to do?" (Fitzgerald 138)

Freud says that all human life is caught in the tensions between the 'pleasure' and 'reality' principle. The novel's central conflict is Gatsby's psychological struggle between 'pleasures' he wishes to have with Daisy and the bare 'reality'. As Fitzgerald rightly points out, He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was. (Fitzgerald 104)

Even though, Daisy did not wait for Gatsby to return from war and chose to marry Tom, Gatsby places a high position in his heart painted in love and he strongly craves to rekindle all the sweet moments they had five years ago. The narrator's words shed light on the love-sick Gatsby and how he loves his lady love. 'He knew that Daisy was extraordinary, but he didn't realize just how extraordinary a 'nice girl' could be', (Fitzgerald 138) 'He felt married to her, that was all'. (Fitzgerald 138) Looking through the lens of 'pleasure principle', we can see that Gatsby's acts are governed by his need to attain 'pleasure' and avoid 'unpleasant'. Adding the flavours of 'reality principle', over time, Gatsby realizes that all our pleasures cannot be fulfilled in the way we wish and chooses other options to attain pleasure. The ambitious Gatsby has set goals and is willing to do anything it takes to achieve them. The novelist demonstrates him as a character who has a special ability to hope and turn dreams into realization. 'Well, there I was, 'way off my ambitions, getting deeper in love every minute and all of a sudden I didn't care.' (Fitzgerald 138)

The conflict between id and ego is 'normal' anxiety, whereas the conflict between ego and superego is the higher level of anxiety. The 'superego' of Gatsby works into action after Daisy has a change of heart and decides to mend her relationship with Tom Buchanan, her husband. When Daisy rejects Gatsby, he goes to the couple's home and stands outside without any actions. Here, Gatsby accepts the social values and taboos imposed by the 'superego' and behaves to respect the marriage's sanctity. If 'id' had ruled Gatsby's mind, for the time being, he would have forced his way inside by breaking the door or by kidnapping Daisy. Gatsby's 'ego' manifested by the external world's direct influence restrained him from dangerous deeds considered unacceptable by society.

We can see Gatsby's superego overpowering his 'id' when he walks for the pool of his home despite having been desperately expecting a phone call from his love Daisy. Towards the end of the novel, Gatsby seems to be consciously experiencing and reacting to the external world where his 'ego' finds a balance between 'id' and his 'superego', thus no longer running behind his dangerous desires. But the surprising chain of events with twists and turns in response to Gatsby's id-driven pursuit of Daisy leads to a pathetic tragedy long before the 'ego' succeeds in controlling the rampant expression of Gatsby's deepest desires.

We are navigating across an unprecedented Covid Pandemic situation in which we care for ourselves and the others. Distance has become the new proximity! The masks and sanitisers used only for surgical purposes have now become a habit of our daily lives. Earlier, out of ignorance, society has even warned of the health problems that may cause masks. On the contrary, people are continuously using sanitisers and handwash to ensure health and hygiene. As we haven't even thought in the worst dreams about tasting a Pandemic, but it has become an ultimate reality. It was a tough phase where we couldn't move out, communicate in person without fear, and even lost the community experience in all its aspects. At the beginning of the Pandemic, we all have faced mental agony and dilemma since it was something very hard to accept for us. We, the citizens of the 21st century, practised the art of simple living, enjoyed and learned the new possibilities of digital communication. We get connected through Google Meet, Zoom, Webex, WhatsApp calls, and in a way, it increased the bonding with others.

Putting the same into Gatsby's life, he couldn't bear the reality of losing his love; he was caught in the web of depression, lost his self-confidence, tied into the clutches of inferiority complex. He even lost his passion for exploring the world and interacting with the people around him. Life is not a bed of roses. We cannot always expect good things to happen in life; we have to face challenges and hardships in our course of life. We should never allow surrendering our compromise before the failures in our life. Consider it only as a chapter; more chapters are unread in the life of the book. As we understood the reality and faced it with optimism, confidence and determination exploring the possibilities opened in the crisis, Gatsby struggles to adjust to the reality and tries his level best to come out of his trauma. Gatsby acts as a touchstone character that has high relevance in the present scenario.

The Great Gatsby's final lines serve as a sort of epitaph for both Gatsby and the novel with Freudian overtones; "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past". (Fitzgerald 166) The novel's ending becomes a symbolic reassertion of the conservative American values rooted in domesticity, honesty, and simplicity. Looking through the lens of Freud's psychoanalysis, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* generates from the embryonic dream of Jay Gatsby based on the romantic youth, which suits the best soil for psychoanalytical reading. *The Great Gatsby*, by Fitzgerald, is an appreciable literary work that expounded the repressed psyche of the psychoanalytical character, Jay Gatsby.

CONCLUSION

Literature, with its multidisciplinary approach, has a well-defined, intimate symbiotic relationship with psychology. The psychoanalytical criticism, which has evolved as an established and highly influential school in literary criticism, has endless vistas and perspectives to offer. It's evident that Jay Gatsby becomes very engaging and profound because of the creative brilliance of Fitzgerald in incorporating psychoanalytical traits to him. Undoubtedly, looking through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, the central character of the novel, Jay Gatsby, is a perfect psychoanalytical hero who gives enlightening lessons on the importance of simple, empathetic and humanitarian life.

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