



Boats against the current

This extract, from the last pages of the novel, starts with Gatsby's funeral; Daisy, the woman he had loved so deeply, and her husband, Tom Buchanan, are not present. Only Gatsby's father, Mr Gatz, and the narrator, Nick Carraway, mourn him. The passage is a sort of epilogue, a final comment on the loneliness of Gatsby's life and the futility of his dream.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald
The Great Gatsby
(1925)

Chapter IX

About five o'clock our procession of three cars reached the cemetery and stopped in a thick drizzle¹ beside the gate – first a motor hearse², horribly black and wet, then Mr Gatz and the minister and I in the limousine, and, a little later, four or five servants and the postman from West Egg in Gatsby's station wagon, all wet to the skin. As we started
5 through the gate into the cemetery I heard a car stop and then the sound of someone splashing after us over the soggy ground³. I looked around. It was the man with owl-eyed glasses⁴ whom I had found marvelling over Gatsby's books in the library one night three months before.

I'd never seen him since then. I don't know how he knew about the funeral or even
10 his name. The rain poured down⁵ his thick glasses and he took them off and wiped⁶ them to see the protecting canvas unrolled⁷ from Gatsby's grave. I tried to think about Gatsby then for a moment but he was already too far away and I could only remember, without resentment, that Daisy hadn't sent a message or a flower. Dimly I heard someone murmur 'Blessed are the dead that the rain falls on⁸', and then the owl-eyed
15 man said 'Amen to that,' in a brave voice.

We straggled down⁹ quickly through the rain to the cars. Owl-eyes spoke to me by the gate.

'I couldn't get to the house,' he remarked.

'Neither could anybody else.'

'Go on!' He started¹⁰. 'Why, my God! they used to go there by the hundreds.' He took
20 off his glasses and wiped them again outside and in.

'The poor son-of-a-bitch¹¹,' he said.

[...]

Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware¹² of
25 its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen¹³ towns beyond the Ohio with their interminable inquisitions which spared¹⁴ only the children and the very old – even then it had always for me a quality of distortion. West Egg¹⁵, especially, still figures¹⁶ in my more fantastic dreams. I see it as a night scene by El Greco¹⁷: a hundred houses, at once conventional and grotesque, crouching under a sullen, overhanging sky¹⁸ and a
30 lustreless¹⁹ moon. In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher²⁰ on which lies a drunken woman in a white evening dress. Her hand, which dangles over²¹ the side, sparkles²² cold with jewels. Gravely the men turn in at house – the wrong house. But no one knows the woman's name, and no one cares.

After Gatsby's death the East was haunted²³ for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction. So when the blue smoke of brittle²⁴ leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line²⁵ I decided to come back home.

[...]

One afternoon late in October I saw Tom Buchanan. He was walking ahead of me
40 along Fifth Avenue in his alert, aggressive way, his hands out a little from his body as if to fight off interference, his head moving sharply here and there, adapting itself to his restless²⁶ eyes. Just as I slowed up to avoid overtaking him²⁷ he stopped and began frowning into the windows²⁸ of a jewelry store. Suddenly he saw me and walked back holding out his hand.

'What's the matter, Nick? Do you object²⁹ to shaking hands with me?'

'Yes. You know what I think of you.'

- 1 drizzle. Pioggerellina.
- 2 hearse. Carro funebre.
- 3 soggy ground. Terreno bagnato.
- 4 owl-eyed glasses. Occhiali da gufo.
- 5 poured down. Grondava da.
- 6 wiped. Pulì.
- 7 the protecting canvas unrolled. Il telo di protezione che veniva srotolato.
- 8 Blessed ... falls on. Benedetti i morti bagnati dalla pioggia.
- 9 We straggled down. Ci sparpagliammo.
- 10 He started. Si incamminò.
- 11 The poor son-of-a-bitch. Povero figlio di buona donna.
- 12 keenly aware. Acutamente consapevole.
- 13 sprawling, swollen. Disordinate, roboanti.
- 14 inquisitions which spared. Curiosità morbosa che risparmiava.
- 15 West Egg. Il lato meno alla moda di Long Island dove abitavano Gatsby e Nick.
- 16 still figures. Riaffiora ancora.
- 17 El Greco. Pittore spagnolo del '500, di origine cretese, la cui pittura è caratterizzata da immagini distorte e buie.
- 18 crouching ... sky. Acquattate sotto un cielo cupo e incombente.
- 19 lustreless. Opaca.
- 20 stretcher. Lettiga, barella.
- 21 dangles over. Penzola da.
- 22 sparkles. Luccica.
- 23 was haunted. Era infestato dai fantasmi.
- 24 brittle. Fragili.
- 25 blew ... line. Gonfiava il rigido bucato bagnato sulla corda.
- 26 restless. Inquieti.
- 27 to avoid overtaking him. Per evitare di superarlo.
- 28 frowning into the windows. Guardare accigliato nelle vetrine.
- 29 Do you object. Non tolleri.



'You're crazy, Nick,' he said quickly. 'Crazy as hell³⁰. I don't know what's the matter with you.'

50 'Tom,' I inquired, 'what did you say to Wilson that afternoon?' He stared at me³¹ without a word and I knew I had guessed right³² about those missing hours. I started to turn away but he took a step after me and grabbed³³ my arm.

'I told him the truth,' he said. 'He came to the door while we were getting ready to leave and when I sent down word that we weren't in he tried to force his way upstairs. He was crazy enough to kill me if I hadn't told him who owned the car. His hand was
55 on a revolver in his pocket every minute he was in the house –' He broke off³⁴ **defiantly**. 'What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him³⁵. He threw dust³⁶ into your eyes just like he did in Daisy's but he was a tough one³⁷. He ran over³⁸ Myrtle like you'd run over a dog and never even stopped his car.'

There was nothing I could say, except the one unutterable³⁹ fact that it wasn't true.
60 'And if you think I didn't have my share⁴⁰ of suffering – look here, when I went to give up⁴¹ that flat and saw that damn box of dog biscuits sitting there on the sideboard I sat down and cried like a baby. By God it was awful –'

I couldn't forgive him or like him but I saw that what he had done was, to him, **entirely** justified. It was all very careless⁴² and confused. They were careless people. Tom
65 and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess⁴³ they had made...

I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though⁴⁴ I were talking to a child. Then he went into the jewelry store to buy a pearl necklace⁴⁵ – or
70 perhaps only a pair of cuff buttons⁴⁶ – rid of⁴⁷ my provincial squeamishness⁴⁸ forever.

Gatsby's house was still empty when I left – the grass on his lawn⁴⁹ had grown as long as mine. One of the taxi drivers in the village never took a fare past⁵⁰ the entrance gate without stopping for a minute and pointing inside; perhaps it was he who drove Daisy and Gatsby over to East Egg the night of the accident and perhaps he had made
75 a story about it all his own. I didn't want to hear it and I avoided him when I got off the train.

I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those gleaming, dazzling⁵¹ parties of his were with me so vividly that I could still hear the music and the laughter faint⁵² and incessant from his garden and the cars going up and down his drive. One night
80 I did hear a material car there and saw its lights stop at his front steps. But I didn't investigate. Probably it was some final guest who had been away at the ends of the earth and didn't know that the party was over.

On the last night, with my trunk packed⁵³ and my car sold to the grocer I went over and looked at that huge incoherent failure of a house once more. On the white
85 steps an obscene word, scrawled⁵⁴ by some boy with a piece of brick, stood out clearly in the moonlight and I erased it⁵⁵, drawing my shoe **raspingly** along the stone. Then I wandered down to the beach and sprawled out⁵⁶ on the sand.

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon
90 rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away⁵⁷ until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors⁵⁸ eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers⁵⁹ to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath⁶⁰ in the presence
95 of this continent, compelled into⁶¹ an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder⁶². And as I sat there, brooding⁶³ on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out⁶⁴ the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have
100 seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it⁶⁵. He did not know that it was

30 Crazy as hell. Completamente pazzo.

31 He stared at me. Mi fissò.

32 I had guessed right. Avevo indovinato.

33 grabbed. Afferrò.

34 He broke off. Si interruppe.

35 That fellow ... him. Quel tipo ha avuto quel che si meritava.

36 He threw dust. Ha gettato polvere.

37 a tough one. Un delinquente.

38 He ran over. Ha investito.

39 unutterable. Che non si poteva esprimere, rivelare.

40 my share. La mia parte.

41 to give up. Per lasciare.

42 careless. Superficiale, noncurante.

43 the mess. Il pasticcio.

44 as though. Come se.

45 a pearl necklace. Una collana di perle.

46 cuff buttons. Gemelli, bottoni per polsini.

47 rid of. Libero da.

48 squeamishness. Impressionabilità.

49 lawn. Prato.

50 never took a fare past. Non effettuava mai una corsa davanti.

51 gleaming, dazzling. Splendenti, abbaglianti.

52 faint. Languidi.

53 my trunk packed. Il mio baule pronto.

54 scrawled. Scarabocchiata.

55 I erased it. La cancellai.

56 sprawled out. Mi allungai.

57 to melt away. A dileguarsi.

58 Dutch sailors. Marinai olandesi, riferito ai coloni che fondarono New York nel 1613.

59 had once pandered in whispers. Avevano un tempo assecondato sussurrando.

60 must have held his breath. Deve aver trattenuto il respiro.

61 compelled into. Soggiogato da.

62 wonder. Meraviglia.

63 brooding. Meditando tristemente.

64 picked out. Scorse.

65 he could hardly fail to grasp it. Non poteva fare a meno di afferrarlo.



already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the right.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic⁶⁶ future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther... And one fine morning – So we beat on⁶⁷, boats against the current, borne back⁶⁸ **ceaselessly** into the past.

66 **orgastic.** Orgastico.

67 **we beat on.** Continuiamo a bordeggiare.

68 **borne back.** Respinti.

LITERARY COMPETENCE

> VOCABULARY

1 READ the text and match the highlighted adverbs of manner with their meaning.

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------------------|
| 1 | in a challenging way |
| 2 | not clearly |
| 3 | clearly |
| 4 | endlessly |
| 5 | solemnly |
| 6 | harshly |
| 7 | involving a sudden change of direction |
| 8 | completely |
| 9 | intensely |

> COMPETENCE: READING AND UNDERSTANDING A TEXT

2 READ about Gatsby's funeral in lines 1-22 again. Make notes about

- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| • the time; | • the people; |
| • the cars; | • the narrator's thoughts; |
| • the weather; | • the epitaph. |

3 READ lines 24-70 again and say whether the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.

- The narrator is still fascinated by the East.
- He pictures West Egg to himself as a grotesque painting.
- The people in the East are happy and concerned.
- The narrator looks forward to speaking to Tom Buchanan.
- Tom's behaviour is very polite.
- Wilson had gone to Tom's house to kill him.
- Tom thinks that Gatsby had run Myrtle over.
- The narrator knows it was not true.
- Tom had moved to the flat he used to share with his mistress Myrtle.
- The narrator sympathises with Tom.

4 READ lines 71-106 again and answer the following questions.

- What was Gatsby's house like when Nick left?
- Why does Nick spend his Saturday nights in New York?
- What does he mean when he says that 'the party was over'?
- What does he find when he visits the house for the last time?
- Where does he go after that? What does he think about?
- What was Gatsby's failure according to Nick?



➤ **COMPETENCE: ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING A TEXT**

5 CHOOSE from among the following to define the narrator, Nick Carraway. Tick as appropriate.

- ☐ The story is told from his point of view.
- ☐ He is involved in the action.
- ☐ He observes and comments upon the action.
- ☐ He is omniscient.
- ☐ He is objective and detached.
- ☐ He is the author's moral conscience.

6 FOCUS on the use of tenses and say whether the story is narrated in chronological order. Why do you think Fitzgerald chose this type of narrative?

7 ANALYSE the character of the man with owl-eyed glasses.

- 1 Has he got a name? What does the narrator call him? Are we given a physical description?
- 2 The narrator just describes his actions. Underline them and try to explain their meaning.

8 FOCUS on Tom Buchanan. Make notes about

- his way of walking;
- his head;
- his eyes.

How would you describe his character?

9 WRITE down the phrases from the text referring to Daisy and say what kind of person she is.

10 FIND the dominant image in the lines devoted to the funeral. What atmosphere does it create?

11 FOCUS on the symbols in the text.

- 1 Point out the signs of power Gatsby has surrounded himself with.
- 2 What image stands out as the symbol of his hopes and dreams?
- 3 The myth of the 'American Dream' is introduced by means of a comparison. Point out its terms and try to explain its meaning.

12 SAY what Gatsby and Nick stand for.

➤ **COMPETENCE: ESTABLISHING LINKS AND RELATIONSHIPS**

13 COMPARE *The Great Gatsby* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (→ 6.15) as regards

- the narrative technique;
- the figure of the narrator;
- the hero;
- the author's aim.

➤ **COMPETENCE: LINKING LITERATURE TO PERSONAL EXPERIENCE**

14 DISCUSS. How important are dreams and illusions in a man's life? Do you think it is possible to devote a whole life to fulfilling a desire?