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A Psychoanalytic Interpretation:
*Jay Gatsby's Id, Superego, Ego, and Core
Issues*

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Title

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Abstract

The present essay attempts a psychoanalytic interpretation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby's *id*, *superego*, *ego*, and *core issues*. The first stage of the paper offers an analysis of Gatsby's *id*, *superego* and *ego*; and finds that the *id* largely rules his behaviour, with few instances where the *ego* takes control and manifests the *superego*. The second stage proposes that three psychoanalytic *core issues* are identifiable in the character of Gatsby: *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*. Through the lens of Psychoanalytic Criticism, the present essay looks at fictional literature in order to gain insight into the human psyche, in hopes of discussing and spreading awareness about mental health.

Keywords

The Great Gatsby, psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic criticism, id ego superego, fear of abandonment, low self-esteem, insecure sense of self, Jay Gatsby

The present essay attempts a psychoanalytic interpretation of *id*, *superego*, *ego*, and *core issues* in the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby. The first stage of the paper offers an analysis of Gatsby's *id*, *superego* and *ego*, and finds that the *id* largely rules his behaviour, with few instances where the *ego* takes control and manifests the *superego*. The second stage proposes that three psychoanalytic *core issues* are identifiable in the character of Gatsby: *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*. Through the lens of Psychoanalytic Criticism, the present essay looks at fictional literature in order to gain insight into the human psyche, in hopes of discussing and spreading awareness about mental health.

Psychoanalytic Criticism, the critical literary theory that the present paper endeavours to apply, is used as a means to understand cultural texts, illuminating aspects of the text in connection to psychological states that are conflicted in nature. According to psychoanalysis, the *unconscious* is a storehouse of painful experiences and emotions, wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflicts that one does not want to know about because one feels overwhelmed by them (Tyson 12). It is a dynamic entity that engages at the deepest level of being.

Inside the *unconscious*, many different psychical processes take place. Among those, the present paper seeks to draw from the following, by Sigmund Freud: *id*, *superego*, and *ego*; and the following three *core issues*: *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem*, *insecure or unstable sense of self*. Psychoanalytic criticism draws on terms from psychoanalysis to analyse the psychological states of fictional characters, in the present paper's case, the protagonist of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby. Before beginning the analysis, the present paper aims to explain each of the psychoanalytic concepts to be applied.

The *id* is the part of one's psyche that contains one's true, prohibited, desires; a psychological reservoir of repressed aggressive desires (Tyson 25). It contains one's instincts

and devotes itself to the pursuit and fulfilment of desires without regard for any consequences or punishments (Tyson 25). The desires are considered prohibited due to social restrictions, but the *id* does not know “no”, and seeks to overwhelm the part of the psyche that does take social restrictions into account: the *superego*.

The *superego* is the part of one's psyche that is (consciously or unconsciously) concerned with what is socially accepted or not, with values, taboos, with right and wrong (Tyson 25); a kind of socio-culturally-backed rationality. The *superego* is responsible for the sense of guilt (Tyson 25), which in turn is based on what society and culture establish as right or wrong, good or bad. The prohibitions imposed by both society and family are internalised, and the *superego* seeks to carry out the prohibitions' demands, judging and censoring the *id*.

The third and final part of the psychical apparatus, the *ego* manifests itself consciously as one mediates between the fulfilment of prohibited desires (the *id*) and the abiding to society's norms and values (the *superego*) (Tyson 25). In other words, the *ego* acknowledges, understands, and carries out appropriate behaviour in the face of wanting something but not being allowed to have it due to socially-imposed values and norms (Tyson 25). Ultimately, the *ego* seeks to balance the *id*'s unchecked pursuit of its desires' fulfilment while resisting the *superego*'s drive to approve only socially acceptable behaviour. In that sense, the *ego* is based on one's *id* and *superego*, and is created gradually, since childhood, in a process of differentiation between impulses of desire (the *id*) and the acceptance of external pressures (the *superego*).

Moving on to the concept of *core issues*, Tyson defines it as deep-rooted psychological issues that “define our being in fundamental ways” (17). Their manifestation is not occasional, such as being temporarily sad or feeling insecure would be. Instead, *core issues* are permanent unless addressed. Tyson writes that *core issues*, usually unconsciously, “determine our behaviour in destructive ways” (17). The present paper uses three *core issues*

in its psychoanalytic analysis of Jay Gatsby: *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*, which are to be presently explained.

The *core issue* of *fear of abandonment* is often characterised by *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self* (Guex 31, 29). In other words, the three *core issues* are interconnected. In that sense, *fear of abandonment* can be verified by verifying the presence of *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*. The latter two *core issues* are only observed in those who suffered “privations of empathy and love during infancy” (Guex 16), which is, in turn, at the root of *fear of abandonment*.

Fear of abandonment takes place when one believes, even without reason to, that one's friends, family, or acquaintances will abandon them. The abandonic (those who suffer from *fear of abandonment* (Guex 2)) feels terrorised by the threat of “conflict, rupture, separation, isolation, solitude, lack of love”, and is “haunted by the fear of losing love” (Guex 29, 33). Abandonment can be physical, in the sense of being physically left alone, or emotional, in the sense of believing that one is not truly cared about. A characteristic of *fear of abandonment* is that it develops during infancy and into a chronic debilitation that “noticeably disrupt[s] character and behaviour” (Guex 2). Guex writes that the main reason for the development of *fear of abandonment* is “the privation of love” (8) in infancy.

Another aspect of the condition is that abandonics “most often [have] very high emotional potential and a wealth of feelings” (Guex 16), but, crucially, these feelings are never channelled in a beneficial way, due to emotional imbalance, anxiety, and affective insecurity. Guex writes that another characteristic of those with the condition is aggression (16). The aggression varies in strength, and becomes more intense when “fuelled by loss” (16), such as loss of love, and by the damage endured as a result of the loss.

A third and final characteristic of *fear of abandonment* is having been *othered* during childhood. Guex writes that to be *othered* can be to be treated as preferred absent, as not

needed at all, or as a surplus (24). The scholar goes on to write that the *other* develops *fear of abandonment* because he or she constantly expects repudiation and abandonment (24). To be abandoned feels “horribly” (Guex 24) lonely, which contributes to fearing abandonment.

The second *core issue* used in the present paper’s analysis, *low self-esteem, or lack of self-respect and any real interest in the self* (Guex 31), can be physical (such as lack of personal hygiene or neglect of appearance) or emotional (Guex 31). In the latter case, Guex writes, one overestimates others while underestimating oneself (31); in other words, those with *low self-esteem* use criteria to judge others that they do not use to judge themselves, always detrimentally to themselves and favourably to others. Furthermore, the scholar writes that sufferers of *low self-esteem* attempt to behave in ways that are attractive to others due to their *fear of abandonment* while in fact having no self-value or self-respect (31). Finally, those with *low self-esteem* overvalue the moral, social, and intellectual domains (Guex 31).

Insecure or unstable sense of self, or false sense of self (Guex 29), manifests itself in the inability to sustain feelings of personal identity, of knowing oneself. Those who experience *insecure or unstable sense of self* are also very vulnerable to the influence of other people. Guex writes that *false sense of self* gives one the belief of being affectively worthless (29). The feeling begins in childhood and is reinforced by the mistakes and failures of adult life, which gives one a constantly “vague and incoherent false sense of self” (Guex 29).

The feeling of inferiority that is connected to *insecure sense of self* “oscillates between excessive self-doubt and ambition”, because those who experience it are “unable to grasp the concept of moderation” (Guex 29). In other words, every aspect of their lives is exaggerated, either leaning towards excess or abstinence. Guex writes that this false reality, in which everything is exaggerated, generates fantasies that clash with the real world and crumble, because the fantasies cannot exist outside of what one wishes were true (29). This generates frustration that escalates to a sense of despair (Guex 29).

Before beginning the analysis of the primary material, it is important to attempt to clarify the unreliability of the novel's narrator, Nick Carraway, because the present paper takes his words as the source for psychoanalysing Gatsby. Guerin et al. write that the reader sees the world through Carraway's eyes, and must "evaluate and then accept or reject Nick's judgments about Gatsby" (286). In other words, the accuracy of Carraway's retelling of Gatsby's stories cannot be verified. Even when he is allegedly recounting Gatsby's words, he is still the narrator, and therefore the presented facts are subject to Carraway's rewording and even interpretation of the facts and of Gatsby's words, consciously or unconsciously. However, for the purposes of a psychoanalytic analysis of Jay Gatsby, the present study takes the narrator's words as a sufficiently faithful account of the character of Gatsby.

As mentioned above, the present paper endeavours to analyse Jay Gatsby's *id*, *superego*, and *ego*, and argues that the character reveals characteristics of those who experience *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem*, and *insecure or unstable sense of self*.

The first concept of the present paper's psychoanalytic analysis of Jay Gatsby is the *id*. The present paper finds that the *id* largely rules Gatsby's behaviour, with few instances where the *ego* takes control and manifests the *superego*. Jay Gatsby's *id*, *superego* and *ego* manifest themselves as regards his goal and ultimate desire or dream, that of being with Daisy, as well as ascending to a higher class, of which Daisy can be seen as a personification.

Gatsby's *id* engages itself in the larger part of the novel, seen in extravagant parties that he throws in hopes of attracting Daisy and in his openly adulterous pursuit of her. The force of Jay Gatsby's *id* is such that it drowns out the *ego* (Gholipour and Sanahmadi 2), rendering the latter unable to mediate the former for the largest part of the novel. As previously mentioned, the *id* fuels and is fuelled by one's dreams.

Birkerts writes that *The Great Gatsby* addresses "outsized dreams and their bitter ruin" (132), going as far as to say that the narrative is "about dreaming" (132). Gatsby

himself—specifically, his “belief in love” (Birkerts 135)—is an embodiment of the theme. While Gatsby’s dreams, or his *id*’s desires, were unfulfilled, Birkerts writes, he was “not a fool for dreaming, only for not knowing how his dreams intersect with realities” (35). In other words, it is not wrong to have dreams and desires, to turn away from fears or disappointments in favour of bravery and hope, but Gatsby’s naïveté and ultimate tragedy is to have dreamt carelessly and without heed for consequence.

Although Gatsby’s pursuit of his dreams was careless and even reckless, he pursued them with single-mindedness and “spiritual integrity ... [guiding] his life by his dream” (Bigsby 94), and did not separate “romance from reality” (Donaldson 110). In other words, the dream itself was not corrupted, but rather “it always carried within it the seeds of its own corruption” (Bigsby 93). Furthermore, Bigsby supports the point as regards Gatsby’s naïveté and tragedy, writing that although there was “purity and innocence” (94) in Gatsby, this innocence was “naïve and nonfunctional”, as well as “dangerous” (94).

Gatsby’s parties—which were “nothing more than shimmering nets thrown out in the hopes of snaring ... Daisy” (Birkerts 131)—, or his excesses, can be seen as a manifestation of *id*. The *id*’s pursuit of its aggressive desires can be seen as Gatsby’s relentless chase, and the excessive parties a means to the end of attracting his object of desire. The *id* is the antithesis of the *superego*, which binds one’s *conscious*, restricting one’s actions based on internalised social values and taboos that consciously or unconsciously establish one’s sense of right or wrong.

Gatsby’s headstrong attitude concerning the pursuit of his desires can be seen as an example the *id* ruling over the *superego*. The *id* devotes itself to the gratification of prohibited desires of all kinds without an eye to consequence, which precisely falls in line with Gatsby’s naïve, nonfunctional, dangerous, and simultaneously innocent—in its honesty—pursuit of his dreams as earlier described. The *id* essentially is the true form one’s thoughts and not afraid

to reveal and act on them, as Gatsby does repeatedly throughout the novel, not only through the extravagant parties but also through the openness of his chase of Daisy.

His *superego*, the present paper argues, manifests itself only later in the novel, after Daisy has a change of heart and decides to mend her relationship with Tom Buchanan, her husband. After Daisy's rejection of him, Gatsby goes to the couple's home and simply stands outside, without any further action towards Daisy. In that moment, he has consciously or unconsciously accepted the social values and taboos imposed by the *superego* and behaves in a way that is deemed "correct" by society—that of respecting the sanctity of matrimony--, whereas the *id*, if left unchecked, may have led him to continue his chase in spite Daisy's rejection; perhaps, hypothetically, by knocking on the door or forcing his way inside, insisting Daisy to reconsider, or by kidnapping Daisy, so on and so forth. As Gholipour and Sanahmadi write, the *ego* ultimately negotiates with the *id* and the *superego* in order for the character to be able to "release [himself] in non-destructive behavioural patterns" (2). In other words, the *ego* has succeeded in balancing the two opposing forces and is consciously restraining Gatsby from further dangerous actions deemed unacceptable by society.

The second example of Gatsby's *superego* overpowering his *id* comes at the very end of the novel, when Gatsby heads for the pool of his home despite having been desperately expecting a phone call from Daisy (108). Carraway writes that Gatsby either did not believe there would be a phone call, or no longer cared, and for this reason he headed outside of the house. In this moment, Gatsby has accepted that the outcome of the pursuit of his dream is out of his hands, the *id* no longer manifests itself, and the *ego* finally succeeds in balancing the *id* against the *superego*. In the moment he steps outside despite the possibility of receiving a precious phone call that would mean the culmination of his lifelong dream, Gatsby is consciously experiencing and reacting to the external world, through senses (Tyson 25) and arguably, temporarily, a more solid sense of self-image and stability, characterised by

the *ego*. He is no longer recklessly pursuing his dangerous desires: the *ego* has balanced out the *id* and the *superego*.

However, it can be ultimately perceived that Jay Gatsby's *ego* manifests itself too late in the story. Gholipour and Sanahmadi write that Gatsby's "emotional dysfunction ... [is] ascribed implicitly to [his] inability to survive and outgrow the unresolved conflict latent in [him], thus making way for tragedy to surface" (3). In other words, the *ego* is only able to reckon with the *id* and the *superego* after the damage is done. The chain of events, fuelled by Gatsby's unchecked, *id*-driven pursuit of Daisy that leads to tragedy completes its course before the *ego* succeeds in reining in the rampant expression of Gatsby's deepest desires. The *id* is left unchecked for too long—the character relinquishes self-restraint, and even common sense, for too long—and by the time he allows rationality (the *superego*) to play a role and finds some form of stability (exercised by the *ego*), the pieces for a tragic outcome have been put into place.

The present paper maintains that Gatsby displays characteristics pertaining to three core issues: *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*. The first concept, *fear of abandonment*, is initially suggested by Gatsby's lack of friends, as illustrated by the emptiness of his funeral, which only Carraway and one other person, the unnamed man with owl-eyed glasses, attended. Another indication is that Gatsby's relationship with his family was distant. He left home early, with only one family member, his father, coming into the text, and only at the end of the novel, after Gatsby's death, when it is revealed that Gatsby saw him "two years ago and bought [him] the house" (115). He had no other immediate family that the reader is made aware of.

Bramaditya writes that Gatsby always rejected having been born to a poor family, and believes he is different from them (39). The reason is mentioned in the passage "His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination never really accepted them as

his parents at all" (65). This passage indicates that he did not bear to accept them as his parents, which indicates that their relationship was cold and distant, at least from the part of Gatsby. The passage also states the reason for this: the fact that his parents were ordinary farm people. However, it appears, judging by the negative implications of the phrase "shiftless and unsuccessful", and somewhat pejorative "farm people" (as opposed to "farmers", which bears a more positive connotation), that in Gatsby's eyes they were lazy, apathetic, perhaps failures.

Having a "Platonic conception of himself" (Fitzgerald 65), Gatsby had great ambitions, unlike his parents. He envisioned for himself a different life, future, and even a different personality than the one he had been given by his biological parents. Instead, he felt that he was "a son of God" (Fitzgerald 65), which in a sense allowed him to be whomever he wanted to be, to redetermine his very existence and to be the master of his own fate. In relinquishing connection with his biological parents, he determines that he owes justification only to "His Father" (Fitzgerald 65), and therefore, he believes, can alter the course of his life as he pleases. He changes his name at only seventeen (Fitzgerald 64), and invents a new persona to go with the new name.

In psychoanalytic terms, following the above information provided by the novel, it is possible to contemplate that Gatsby felt *othered* by his parents, or perhaps he *othered* himself, due to their differences in life choices. As previously described, the experience of *othering* is at the root of the development of *fear of abandonment*. Privation of affection and love are also inherent in *fear of abandonment*, and so it is arguable that these may have also been issues at play during Gatsby's infancy. In fact, Gatsby's outright rejection of his parents, which evidences a shaky relationship, arguably occurs as a result of lack of love from (and consequentially for) his parents. As *fear of abandonment* only develops if an infant receives lack of love, it is arguably consequentially a sign that Gatsby suffered from *fear of*

abandonment.

Another indication of the *fear of abandonment* is Gatsby's rather frantic and rather relentless pursual of Daisy. Such a behaviour is characteristic to those who suffer from *fear of abandonment*: they "most often [have] very high emotional potential and a wealth of feelings" (Guex 16). However, Guex writes, these emotions and feelings are never manifested in ways that are beneficial, because the forces behind them are emotional imbalance, anxiety, and affective insecurity, which recur from an infancy where emotional needs were not met. (16)

As regards Jay Gatsby, an example of a high degree of emotional potential and wealth of feelings is in that Gatsby avidly seeks to claim Daisy for himself, going as far as to request that she tell her husband that she "never loved him" (88). This request is intense, possessive, but also shows that Gatsby is keenly passionate and emotional, as per the diagnosis of those who suffer from *fear of abandonment*. Further matching the diagnosis, his feelings are arguably not beneficial, because the request is selfish in nature, indeed a disruptive, uncomfortable imposition on a married couple.

Guex finds that another characteristic is of those who experience *fear of abandonment* is aggression (16). Furthermore, the scholar writes that the aggression varies in strength, and is more intense when "fuelled by loss" (16), such as loss of love, and by the damage endured as a result of the loss. Aside from a high degree of emotional potential and a wealth of feelings, aggression can also be verified in Gatsby's pursual of Daisy. It is arguably destructive, because of both how it took place and how it ended; it was so aggressively intense, culminating in the headstrong imposition for her to deny having ever loved her husband, that it pushed her away. It not only failed to reach the goal of being with her romantically but, by the end of it, due to the widespread damage that it did, they could not even at least remain friends. The aggressive nature of Gatsby's pursual of Daisy ultimately

shatters his relationship with her.

The manner through which he pursued her was highly aggressive, because it was fatal: the death of Myrtle, and even Gatsby's death, because his death came about, ultimately, because Daisy ran over Myrtle: an act that only takes place because Gatsby was in the throes of pursuing Daisy. Because Gatsby was so deeply in love with her, and arguably still because of his goal of being with her (he wanted to protect her in part so that he could ultimately be with her), he lied that he had been the one driving when Myrtle Wilson was run over, when in fact it had been Daisy. This act leads to Myrtle's husband, George Wilson, killing Gatsby.

Having analysed the potential presence of *fear of abandonment* in the character, the present paper proceeds to the second *core issue*, *low self-esteem*. Schneiderman writes that "fundamentally, Gatsby lacked self-esteem" (218). The scholar points to different reasons, such as the character's need for acceptance by the elite, and the lack of a father figure who could offer a "strong, positive sense of self" (224). Husniyati, in turn, writes that Gatsby had an inferiority complex resulting of his failure to obtain Daisy (3).

The present paper argues that there are a further three indications of Gatsby's *low self-esteem*: firstly, he makes no effort to distance himself from the dark rumours that circulate him, which suggests lack of respect and value in the self, and that he feels unworthy of good rumours and even self-denigratingly worthy of dark rumours; secondly, he attempts to behave in ways that are attractive to others, due to, the present paper argues, *fear of abandonment*; third and finally, the character overvalues the moral, social, and intellectual domains, which is another key aspect of *low self-esteem* (Guex 31).

As regards the first point, rumours surrounding Gatsby range in degree of gravity, from "harmless" (it can be argued that all rumours are essentially harmful), to serious, dangerous, damaging, or even absurd. Some examples can be found in the following passages: "he was a German spy during the war" (29); "he was in the American army during

the war.” (29); “I’ll bet he killed a man” (29); “he was an Oxford man” (32); “He’s a bootlegger” (40); “he was a nephew to Von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil” (40); “I raised him up out of nothing, right out of the gutter” (114).

The above rumours indicate people's attitude towards Gatsby: lack of loyalty or even respect; suspicion, mistrust, accusations, scrutiny, taking for-granted, gossiping, distance, disinterest, even scorn and insolence. Through the following passage, it is suggested that Gatsby knew about the rumours: “I don’t want you to get a wrong idea of me from all these stories you hear” (Fitzgerald 42). Even so, the character does not attempt to distance himself from or disprove said rumours. This attitude corresponds with the *low self-esteem* characteristic of underestimating oneself while overestimating others (Guex 29). Specifically, it can be argued that, due to *low self-esteem*, Gatsby finds himself unworthy of refuting the dark rumours, or even worthy of them; and, simultaneously, overestimates those who produce the rumours, as though it were their right to do so.

The second way in which *low self-esteem* can be perceived, previously mentioned, is the attempt to behave in ways that are attractive to others due to *fear of abandonment* (Guex 31). This can be observed in Jay Gatsby through the extravagant parties that he throws, and even through his myth-like persona itself. Schneiderman writes that Gatsby sought wealth and status—the former through bootlegging and the latter, more crucial to the present paper’s psychoanalytic approach, through “conspicuous display” (224).

Gatsby’s conspicuous display can be perceived in his extravagant lifestyle and impressive persona, evidenced in passages such as “In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths” (25). Evoking the idiom “drawn like a moth to a flame”, in this case, the moths are the partygoers, and the light or fire is Gatsby and his parties. It appears that attending Gatsby’s parties was in the “in”, due to their fame and notoriety in New York's society: Carraway states that he “was one of the few guests who had actually been invited [to

the party]" (27). This passage implies that people attended Gatsby's parties regardless of receiving an invitation, for the parties had a high reputation, which partly extended to the people who attended them.

Moreover, people took rides with each other to the parties, as seen in the following dialogue by the man with owl-eyed spectacles: "'Who brought you?' ... 'Or did you just come? I was brought. Most people were brought'" (30). It is also mentioned that, on the weekends, Gatsby's "Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains" (26). According to such passages, it seems that there was a large number of people who were very keen to attend Gatsby's parties, almost in a frenzied way.

Aside from his extravagant parties and myth-like persona, an instance of attempting to appear attractive to others due to *fear of abandonment* is another characteristic of *low self-esteem* (Guex 31). The present paper argues that this factor can be perceived in Gatsby. A specific example is his gifting Jordan an expensive evening gown because she tore hers at one of his parties. Jordan claims that the reason for his action is that he does not want trouble with "*anybody*" (29), but his behaviour, in this instance, displays a kind of over-compensation that points to the deeper issues of *low self-esteem*.

Further to the desire of appearing attractive to others, those with *low self-esteem* fear of anything that may risk abandonment or solitude. Sufferers of *fear of abandonment* see this risk everywhere (Guex 28), and constantly attempt to guard against it. They are sensitive to failure and extremely vulnerable to misunderstandings that can appear to mean lack of love. Gatsby's gifting of the expensive evening gown may also be a manifestation of his *low self-esteem* leading him to fear losing an affective connection as a result of an issue. Further to this point, Bramaditya writes that Gatsby had a "desire for reputation, recognition,

appreciation by other [sic] of one's abilities and feeling of importance" (15), a behaviour that endeavours to fulfil esteem needs. In other words, due to the affective vulnerabilities of one who suffers from *low self-esteem*, Gatsby endeavours to guard against the risk of abandonment by correcting the issue of Jordan's dress.

The third way in which Gatsby's *low self-esteem* can be perceived relates to the fact that those with of *low self-esteem* overvalue others in the moral, social, and intellectual domains while unfairly undervaluing oneself (Guex 31). In Jay Gatsby's case, this can be verified (a)morally, socially, and intellectually, when he recounts to Carraway the time when he met and fell in love with Daisy (Fitzgerald 99). Daisy, the present paper argues, can be seen as a personification of this elite class, and therefore the analysis of Gatsby's feelings about her, in a sense, can address his feelings about the elite. Schneiderman also makes this point, writing, "[Gatsby's] craving for Daisy's approval symbolizes his yearning for acceptance by her prestigious social set" (224).

Before beginning, it is important to note that, at this point in the novel, while Carraway is still the narrator, he is allegedly recounting Gatsby's words. For the purposes of a psychoanalytic analysis of Jay Gatsby, the present study takes the narrator's words as a sufficiently faithful account of what was spoken by the character of Gatsby. Presently, each point is to be analysed from the perspective of overvaluing the other (Daisy, and consequentially the elite class), and, subsequently, from the perspective of undervaluing oneself (Gatsby).

(A)morally, he felt drawn to the fact that Daisy had been with other men before, as seen in the passage "It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy—it increased her value in his eyes" (99). This is a view that places high value on the (a)moral aspects of being with Daisy. The reason for saying amoral and not moral is that Daisy having been with other men belongs to the realm of morality, but it would be perceived as negative,

or amoral, by society; unlike by Gatsby, who viewed it as a positive, and even attractive, factor, arguably because of feelings of affective unworthiness connected with *fear of abandonment*.

Socially, Gatsby placed high value on Daisy's wealth and social status, as seen in passages: "She was the first "nice" girl he had known" (99), which can be read as wealthy and socially privileged; "It amazed him—he had never been in such a beautiful house before" (99), indicating that she was in a higher class than him and his acquaintances; "She vanished into her rich house, into her rich, full life" (99), clearly and unceremoniously states that she was rich, emphasised by the repetition of the word, which highlights the importance, to Gatsby, of the fact that she was rich.

Intellectually, it can be deduced that Daisy, due to her higher socioeconomic class, had access to greater opportunities than Gatsby did. This can be perceived in the passage "and at any moment the invisible cloak of [Gatsby's] uniform might slip from his shoulders" (99). This passage implies that Gatsby's officerhood was the only intellectual property, or credential, that he possessed, and, were it to fall, he would have nothing else (that he considered to be) of value to show underneath.

The above examples aim to show the side of *low-self esteem* that overvalues the other in the moral, social, and intellectual domains, and so the other side remains to be analysed: the undervaluing of oneself. Fortier and Wasser write that matching up to the social standards of one's environment directly affects one's self-esteem (6). Gatsby attempted to live up to these expectations (Fortier and Wasser 6), which further hints to an internal self-esteem struggle. Jay Gatsby undervalued himself in the following ways:

(A)morally, it can be deduced that, in finding excitement in the fact that "many men had already loved Daisy" (99), Gatsby deemed himself unworthy of being the first, or even the only one, to be with her. As a brief side point, it is important to note that this observation

regards Gatsby's mentality at that point in time, in the past, before, as Carraway puts it, his glorious future as Jay Gatsby. Later in the novel, after reaching higher a socioeconomic level, Gatsby avidly seeks to claim Daisy for himself, going as far as to request that she tell her husband that she "never loved him" (88).

However, past Gatsby relinquishes that claim to Daisy and accepts, indeed appears to welcome, the existence of other men in her life, going as far as to feel "their presence all about [Daisy's] house, pervading the air with the shades and echoes of still vibrant emotions" (99). In this passage, it appears as though Gatsby indeed puts a positive spin on it, with the phrase "still vibrant emotions." It can be argued that this (falsely) optimistic perception of Daisy's relations with other men is a manifestation of the lack of self-value and self-respect inherent in sufferers of *low self-esteem*.

Socially, it is verified that Gatsby did not originally come from a high socioeconomic level. This can be noticed in the passages: "he had come into contact with such people, but always with indiscernible barbed wire between" (99). In this passage, "such people" refers to a higher socioeconomic class. While Gatsby had been exposed to them, he did not belong to their class, for there was always "barbed wire", or a much-defined gap, an insurmountable distance, between him and them. Furthermore, at that point in time, Gatsby was "a penniless young man ... without a past" (99), in other words, he had no social status. Another example of Gatsby's feelings of socioeconomic inferiority can be found in the passage "Daisy, gleaming like silver, ... above the hot struggles of the poor" (100). In this passage, Gatsby simultaneously overvalues Daisy when he gives her the prosperous quality of "gleaming like silver" and undervalues himself by claiming that he was a poor person with "hot struggles".

Further points to Gatsby's social undervaluing of himself can be perceived in the passage "he knew that he was in Daisy's house by a colossal accident" (99). In other words, he was keenly aware of his social inferiority to Daisy, and was clearly harsh on himself, for

he did not even attempt to compensate the social inferiority with any potentially positive aspect of himself or of his life. He simply, matter-of-factly, deeply believed that he was inferior to her, insofar as he socially undervalued himself due to *low self-esteem*. Another clear example can be found in the passage “he had no real right to touch her hand” (99). This shows Gatsby’s keen sense of inferiority to Daisy, to the point of saying that he was not worthy of even touching her hand.

The third and final domain of undervaluation due to *low self-esteem* is intellectual, which can be seen as occurring in Jay Gatsby in the following passages: “She thought I knew a lot because I knew different things from her” (100). Here, Gatsby makes it clear that he believes he was not very knowledgeable, just that he simply knew different things from Daisy. To say that she “thought” he knew a lot increases the sense of inferiority inherent to the sentiment, because if he states that she “thought” he knew a lot, maybe that is a way of saying the he did not think he actually knew a lot, she just believed he did. This attitude is a clear example of intellectual undervaluation as per the mentality of *low self-esteem*.

A second example of intellectual undervaluation can be found in the passage where Gatsby believes he was “way off [his] ambitions” (100). With this phrase, it is possible to verify that he felt that he was overreaching by attempting to be with Daisy, in trying to obtain a relationship with someone from a higher socioeconomic and intellectual class than him. To be off his ambitions means that he had gone beyond his original ambitions and expectations, which had been lower than what he was currently involved in. He had become involved in something that he had never even considered or hoped to achieve, deducibly because he simply believed that he was below it.

Having discussed the two *core issues of fear of abandonment and low self-esteem*, the present analysis endeavours to move on to the third and final psychoanalytic *core issue* to be considered as regards Jay Gatsby, *insecure or unstable sense of self, or false sense of self*. Like

low self-esteem, false sense of self only occurs in individuals that experience “privations of empathy and love during infancy” (Guex 16), a core characteristic of *fear of abandonment*.

The main sign of Gatsby's *insecure or unstable sense of self*, or *false sense of self*, that the present paper aims to present can be seen towards the end of the novel. It is stated that Gatsby wanted to “recover something, some idea of himself perhaps ... His life had been confused and disordered” (73). This alleged loss of self can be seen as an example of the psychoanalytic concept of *insecure or unstable sense of self*, further analysed below.

An *insecure or unstable sense of self* is the inability to sustain a feeling of personal identity, of knowing oneself. The main reason for Gatsby having lost some of his sense of self is Daisy, as Carraway reveals when he states that the “idea of himself” (73) that Gatsby had lost “had gone into loving Daisy” (73). In other words, something that previously existed inside Gatsby left him, either due to loving Daisy or due to losing her, or perhaps due to both. He lost something, a part of himself: an “idea of himself” (73) can be interpreted psychoanalytically as part of his identity.

Another factor at the root of *false sense of self* is keen awareness of and sensitivity to failure and mistakes (Guex 29). Gatsby essentially failed at securing Daisy, and saw it as a mistake. He states at Tom Buchanan: “[Daisy] only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake” (87). This statement may come across as excuses but it describes two things: firstly, Gatsby's failure at securing Daisy; secondly, how he perceives her marrying someone else: it was a mistake. As regards the failure, the first cause, according to Gatsby himself, is his low social background. The second cause is his participation in the war, which resulted in Daisy not waiting for him. Therefore, Gatsby believes that Daisy having married Tom Buchanan was a mistake. The example illustrates behaviour that is consistent with the aforementioned characteristic of those who experience *false sense of self*: keen awareness of and sensitivity to failure and mistakes.

Another aspect of *false sense of self* is to have an image of oneself that is “what he or she could have become subject to a presence of love and reassurance” (Guex 29). It appears that Gatsby has a very clear image of what his life could have been like had he been successful at being with Daisy. This can be seen in the following passages: “[Gatsby] had been full of the idea [of being with Daisy] so long, dreamed it right through to the end” (61). This passage shows that Gatsby had been envisioning his reunion with Daisy for a long time, to the fine details; in other words, he had a very clear image of what it would be like.

In another passage, it is stated that Gatsby had developed an illusion of “colossal vitality” (63) as regards Daisy, and his reencounter with her, which he had “stored up in his ... heart” (64). He had “thrown himself into [the illusion] with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way” (64). In other words, he had developed a very clear, and very positive, image of his potential life with Daisy—in psychoanalytic terms, of what life, and by extension he himself, could have become subject to reassurance and love.

Another key aspect of *insecure or unstable sense of self* is being very vulnerable to the influence of other people. This can be perceived in Gatsby through the desperate quality of his pursuit of Daisy. This quality suggests that Gatsby's happiness and indeed fulfillment deeply depends on Daisy, and simultaneously on ascending class. This can be perceived in the desperate, almost childishly stubborn quality of Gatsby's dialogue towards Tom Buchanan during their confrontation: “Your wife never loved you,’ ... ‘She's never loved you. She loves me’” (87). He repeats the sentiment several times in different ways, further emphasising desperation.

His desperation takes him as far as telling Daisy to state that she never loved her husband, and, when she is unable to do so, it deeply affects him. He is incredulous, asking, “You loved me *too*?” (88), and her reply “[seems] to bite physically into Gatsby” (88).

Gatsby's desperation grows in the face of his inability to understand or take control of the situation, leading him to ask to speak to Daisy alone. He is in denial of her attitude, and his excuse for it that she is "all excited now" (89). Gatsby's holds on to the fleeting dream and continues to argue with Tom in spite Daisy's clear refusal to take sides.

Ultimately, the confrontation and the shock as a result of Daisy's unexpected—to Gatsby—reaction are felt so deeply by him that he looks as if he had "killed a man" (90). In spite the unforeseen turn of events, Gatsby does not immediately release his dream, and continues to—fruitlessly—talk with Daisy, even after the confrontation that has taken place. He talks with her "excitedly, denying everything, defending his name" (90). The excited quality of Gatsby's behaviour, along with the content of what he says, can be seen as a moment of desperation, of helplessly clinging on. The examples above aim to indicate the depths to which he depended on and was influenced by her existence—in psychoanalytic terms, he was very vulnerable to her influence.

A final point that the present paper aims to make concerning Gatsby's *insecure sense of self* relates to the *issue's* characteristic of oscillating "between excessive self-doubt and ambition" and the inability to "grasp the concept of moderation" (Guex 29). The text itself touches on this matter in the following passage: "[Gatsby] paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" (108). As previously explained, those with *insecure sense of self* exaggerate every aspect of their life, which leads to a false reality. In Jay Gatsby's case, he has excessive ambition, and this ambition fuels the creation of a false reality surrounding his past and his future with Daisy. As previously illustrated, he exaggerates the events of his past with Daisy, as well as the present, and the future. Ultimately, the fantasies clash with the real world and crumble, because they cannot exist outside of what Gatsby wishes were true. This generates frustration that escalates to the sense of despair illustrated in the climatic confrontation with Tom Buchanan.

Schneiderman makes four points that the present paper maintains suggest *insecure* or *unstable sense of self* in *Gatsby*. The first point that Gatsby invented himself because of what he perceived as his father's failure in life (224). His father's failure affected him so that he desired to reinvent himself because of it.

The second point is that Gatsby cannot "make the transition from West Egg to the more impressive East Egg, the habitation of old money" (Schneiderman 224). Spitzmuller and Ilies echo that Gatsby desperately wanted to belong to the elite class of the East Coast (305). In spite the wealth and notoriety that he was able to accrue, Gatsby is unable to shatter the social barrier with those who were born into the elite class. This fact could lead to potential instability of sense of self because it means that Gatsby ultimately cannot be what he wishes to become, cannot completely fulfil the identity that, as a teenager, he set off to construct for himself.

The third point made by Schneiderman that suggests *insecure sense of self* concerns Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy. Gatsby's love for Daisy "has a desperate quality" (224), previously discussed in the present paper as relentless, aggressive, and fatally destructive. The desperate quality of Gatsby's love, in turn, points to a motivation for "self-completion, for healing the wounds of a damaged self" (224), which the present paper back to Carraway's observations, earlier discussed, concerning Gatsby's wish to "recover something, some idea of himself" (Fitzgerald 73).

Gatsby felt that there was something missing inside him, and he wanted to complete himself again. The "idea of himself ... had gone into loving Daisy" (73). In other words, it was lost due to the events that took place with Daisy. These events could be the failure of the fulfilment of their union, due to Daisy having married another man.

The events in question could also be the very love itself, for Daisy, every hope and aspiration that Gatsby poured into her—and, simultaneously, as earlier discussed, into his

desire to ascend class--, his aggressive pursuit of his dreams, his denial of his background, family, and even identity, left something missing inside him, took away a large piece of who he was. The “wounds of a damaged self” (Schneiderman 244) that Gatsby was motivated to heal point to issues beyond Gatsby’s relationship with Daisy, such as a broken relationship with family, background, and identity, which is an overall sign of *insecure or unstable sense of self*.

The text itself suggests this in the passage: “[Gatsby] had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream” (108). The “old warm world” (108) can be interpreted to mean his background, his origins, his true personal identity, all which he erased, eliminated, from his life. The “single dream” (108) refers to Daisy and, the present paper argues, by extension, class ascension. Gatsby lived—and indeed shaped—his life in pursuit of this one dream, which ultimately was unattainable. To feel the loss of the “old warm world” (108), and to be unable to fulfil the single dream on which so much of his constructed identity was reliant, can be analysed psychoanalytically as feeling loss or lack of identity.

The fourth and final point made by Schneiderman that hints at the presence of *insecure sense of self* in Gatsby is that he “stands in need for Daisy’s idealized qualities of ‘class’” (224). This point ties to the earlier analysis of Daisy as the personification of a higher socioeconomic class. Gatsby idealizes both Daisy and the higher class, and he feverously aspires towards both—indeed, he “needs” them; to help define himself, to finalise the polishing of his idealised version of himself. In other words, the present paper maintains, Jay Gatsby has a fragile sense of self and is desperately seeking a way to solidify the identity that he has sculpted for himself out of mud.

In conclusion, the present study’s psychoanalytic interpretation of Jay Gatsby’s presents the following points as regards Gatsby’s *id*, *ego*, *superego*, and *core issues of fear of*

abandonment, low self-esteem, and insecure or unstable sense of self:

Gatsby's *id* engages itself in the larger part of the novel, seen in extravagant parties that he throws in hopes of attracting Daisy and in his chase of her. The *id* is a reservoir of "aggressive desires", and, in Gatsby's case, the aggression is verifiable in his relentless and openly adulterous pursuit of Daisy.

Gatsby's acceptance of Daisy's rejection is the *superego's* manifestation—the adherence by society's values and taboos. Following her rejection, he behaves in a way deemed appropriate and correct by social standards, guided by the *superego*. Furthermore, Gatsby's *superego* overpowers the *id* at the very end of the novel.

The *ego's* role lies in mediating between the *id* and the *superego*, and in Jay Gatsby's case the *ego* is successful only later in the novel. Ultimately, the *ego* stops the *id* from continuing its reckless chase and allows the *superego* to guide Gatsby's actions in a way that is socially acceptable. However, it can be ultimately perceived that the *ego* manifests itself too late to prevent tragedy.

Gatsby's *fear of abandonment* is demonstrated in four different factors: lack of friends and broken relationship with family; *othered* by his family; high emotional potential and wealth of feelings (Guex 16) that are demonstrated in destructive ways; and aggression.

Gatsby's *low self-esteem* is indicated by Gatsby's need for acceptance by the elite (Schneiderman 218); lack of a father figure (Schneiderman 224); inferiority complex resulting from the failure of being with Daisy (Husniyati 3); absence of effort to distance himself from the dark rumours that surround him; attempt to behave in ways that are attractive to others; and overvaluing others in the moral, social, and intellectual domains, while unfairly undervaluing himself (Guex 31).

Insecure or unstable sense of self, or false sense of self (Guex 29), the third and final

core issue analysed, is initially suggested by Gatsby's need to recover a part of himself (Fitzgerald 73). Further analysing the indication, the present paper finds that Gatsby's *insecure sense of self* can be perceived through key factors: having failed to be with Daisy; having invested too much of himself, forsaking background and identity; having a vivid image of himself and of life of how wonderful things "could have been"; being deeply dependant on and influenced by another's existence; and exaggerating and constructing a false reality fuelled by excessive ambition.

Further indications of *insecure or unstable sense of self* follow: Gatsby invents a different identity for himself (Schneiderman 224); he is ultimately unable to fulfil the identity that he aimed towards, because he is unable to completely ascend to the elite class; the desperate quality of his love for Daisy, which points to an incomplete, "damaged self" (Schneiderman 224); and the "[need for] Daisy's idealised qualities of 'class'" (Schneiderman 224) in order to finalise the idealised version of himself.

As regards further psychoanalytic research on the topic of Jay Gatsby, the present paper finds that the primary material offers potential gateways to investigating the following psychoanalytic concepts, as defined by Guex: *fear of revealing the true self* (26); *fear of emotional risk* (28); and *fear of responsibility* (28). Similar to *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*, the aforementioned concepts interconnect with and characterise the overall condition of *fear of abandonment*.

In exploring and seeking to understand a fictional character's psyche and potential *core issues*, through literary psychoanalytic criticism, it is also possible to gain knowledge about the human psyche, and to discuss and spread awareness about mental health, an important issue in today's world, which sometimes people experience but are not comfortable to speak about, or are even discouraged from doing so. Moreover, as explored in the present paper, psychoanalysis reveals that some *core issues* both provoke and are provoked by

materialism and by the desire to ascend class, issues that are still present in our time and damaging to people's psyche. It is important to be aware of the risks of placing materialism before human values, in order to lead a healthier life both inwards and towards others.

The lens of Psychoanalytic Criticism changes the reading of a book. It brings to light the realisation that the work is not just fiction, it is real. It helps in guiding the perception of literature as a mirror of reality, a means through which sense can be made of daily life. In the case of *The Great Gatsby*, with a focus of psychoanalysis, the present paper has endeavoured to identify and analyse a character's *id*, *superego*, and *ego*. Subsequently, the present paper has sought to present cues from within the primary material that hint at certain psychical processes taking place within the character. These processes point to three potential *core issues*: *fear of abandonment*, *low self-esteem* and *insecure or unstable sense of self*.

Through the use of a literary critical lens, it is possible to look beneath the letters on a page and recognise the words as more than prose that constructs an imaginary tapestry of images and a world of make-believe. The sentences and the sentiment transmitted through the immediate experience of reading are lifted to reveal deeper layers of meaning. In this case, the present paper has endeavoured to indicate a few potential psychoanalytic issues that underlie the text. The application of psychoanalytic criticism on *The Great Gatsby*, having led to three potential *core issues*, simultaneously leads to insight into real world issues.

Furthermore, these *core issues* are tied to excessive materialism, fuelling and being fuelled by each other, and to the psychologically and physically damaging repercussions of placing of class ascension before human values. This theme was relevant in Fitzgerald's time, when growing emphasis on financial greed and materialism led to the tragic crack-up of the New York Stock Exchange in 1929. The theme is relevant up until modern times, where high consumerism and individualism are fuelled by ruthless materialism, having peaked at the 2008 global financial crisis.

The lens of psychoanalytic criticism also changes the perception of the character of Jay Gatsby. It allows for the uncovering of different layers of the character: what at first glance appears a confident, wealthy, and successful character changes into one that is actually more fragile, fragmented, and indeed damaged. The character of Jay Gatsby in itself is a representation of literature as a mirror of reality, with multiple layers and characteristic of being more than meets the eye. The character stands as a testament to the depth of Fitzgerald's writing and, further, as a potential gateway into the human psyche, carrying the social repercussion of raising acceptance and understanding, like a ladder between reality and make-believe.

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