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Weather Critiques a Self-Indulgent Society

Self-centered people always end up with the one they truly love most...themselves.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald is man of true independence who lives up to his title. His life has been a great impact to the world around him. In the 1920s, he was pursuing his dreams in a time where movies, fashion, and music was being enhanced. Fitzgerald uses the motif of weather throughout his book in different situations. In *The Great Gatsby*, during different scenes Fitzgerald matches the weather outside with the tension level during the scene. In the novel *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald criticizes a self-indulgent society through the use of the motif of weather in different settings.

“Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1896” (Howes 87). He had a father named, Edward Fitzgerald, and mother named of Mollie McQuillan Fitzgerald. His mother was from an upper-class family with a lot of wealth. After losing a job in the East Coast they started living on Mollie’s inheritance. “Some commentators traced Fitzgerald’s life-long anxiety about financial failure to his father’s inability to support the family” (Howes 88). Fitzgerald started writing good stories.

Fitzgerald’s first detective story was published and appeared in St. Paul Academy newspaper (Howes 88). Many years later, Fitzgerald’s parents sent him to Princeton where he began to write scripts for musicals. Because of his devotion to writing in college, his academics suffered so he left school and went to join the army. In 1919, while he was in the army he met

his wife, Zelda Sayre, who was the daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court judge. After being forever deployed from the army he went to New York City seeking work. After a few months he moved back to St. Paul to rewrite his novel. A week after he published this book he officially married Zelda Sayre in New York and had a daughter named, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, born in 1921. In 1925, *The Great Gatsby* was published, making it one of Fitzgerald's finest works. After he published this novel, his life started to loosen and become unimportant. He was always a heavy drinker which did not help his health any and his wife also suffered from mental health issues. They spent many years in the late 1900's moving back and forth between Delaware and France. After all the drama they went through whether it was dealing with their health or writing books, Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on December 31, 1940 at the age of forty-four, in Hollywood, California. After his death, his book, *The Great Gatsby*, went on to become one of the required books for every American high school student to read and has had a moving effect since the 1920s from generation to generation (Scott 1-3). Fitzgerald had many critical acclaims from many critics.

A critic named "Margaret Marshall calls Fitzgerald['s] "a fair-weather talent" and says that [his book,] "Tender Is the Night" is "a confused exercise in self-pity"; Arthur Mizener says of the same novel that it "remains his most brilliant book... [its] scope is such as to make 'The Great Gatsby' seem small and simple" (Jackson 1). After getting a copy of the book, *The Great Gatsby*, a critic named Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's writes to Fitzgerald through an exciting letter and says, "the general brilliant quality of the book... full of phrases which make a scene blaze with life," then ends his letter saying, "You once told me you were not a natural writer—my God! You have plainly mastered your craft, of course; but you needed far more than craftsmanship for this" (Jackson 1). During this time, movies' sound and color was being

improved.

As expected, the upcoming use of sound in theaters caused a great change in the history of movie production. However, the change from silent films to sound films was not completely hurtful or threatening. Almost every Hollywood major would release their movies into two separate perspectives, giving one a silent film and the other a sound film in an orderly fashioned way. Due to the many problems related to the upcoming of sound, many Hollywood actors/actresses started lacking in excellent performance and their marketability decreased. The technology that producers used was too hard to control. The microphones the actors/actresses hid in their stage clothes bunched up and created bad noise on the soundtrack (Dirks 1). “Silent film studios became obsolescent, and new investments had to be made for expensive new equipment, technological innovations, and sound-proofed stages. Cameras were mounted on moveable, squeak-proofed dollies, and microphones were hung from booms that could be held above the action (outside of the camera's view)” (Dirk 1). Therefore, sound films created a better environment for listeners to enjoy great direct movies with great sound. The sound-film productions became more popular than the silent-films and were being used over half of the country’s movie theaters. The sound of movies was not the only thing improved.

Not only was sound improved, but the color created a new vision to life in the movie theaters. “In the earliest years of the industry, hand-tinting/painting had been tried, but it was largely impractical, laborious, and unrealistic looking. Another process called *Kinemacolor* used a movie camera and projector that both exposed and projected black and white film through alternating red and green filters” (Dirk 1). The movies color and sound improved, and the people around town could now come to see great quality shows in their best fashionable clothes.

Fashion gave off a grand look to individuals in the 1920s, which can be best summarized

as “flappers.” Women were dressed in “short, bobbed hair, powdered face, and painted puckered lips, and they dressed her in rolled stockings and scanty, low-waist dresses that emphasized a boyish figure” (Mihailoff 363). The women who wore this flapper style did almost everything the men did. They did not only show their sexuality through the way they dressed but also through the way they acted: “dancing to jazz, flirting with men, and attending petting parties unchaperoned” (Mihailoff 363). Although the flapper style presented to the world as this way, “the flapper was not a revolutionary figure; rather she was an updated version of the traditional model of womanhood.” (Mihailoff 363) This style did not affect their ability to do women duties, such as, marriage, motherhood, and other stuff which included going out to nightclubs to enjoy the new music that was being brought up.

Jazz Music in the 1920s rises and minorities become celebrities. “In the 1920s, a number of small speakeasies had opened up on West 52nd Street, while prohibition was still in force.” (Shipton 403) Back then, a lot of nightclubs were being opened on West 52nd Street, while the laws for being able to drink liquor or certain kinds of liquor were being put into place. As the years had come to pass, the basements of houses and other buildings were starting one after another to be used as “long, narrow clubs.” (Shipton 404) “There would be a coat check after you came down the few steps inside the front door, a bar running along the side of the room, a small stage straight ahead, and perhaps a kitchen out at the back, next to a cramped band room.” (Shipton 404) The speakeasies seemed to be a place to be for a late night outing back in the 1920s. The Onyx Club was one of the earliest nightclubs to first open its doors in 1927. “It was run by Joe Helbock, and patrons might be entertained by a pianist, such as Joe Sullivan, or a singing string band, such as the Spirits of Rhythm.” (Shipton 404) Fitzgerald uses music through different motifs in his book, for an example, weather.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses a weather motif to establish conflicts in relationships between characters. For an example, Gatsby wanted to have a tea party at Nick's house with Daisy. "The rain cooled about half-past three to a damp mist, through which occasional thin drops swam like dew" (Fitzgerald 84). Fitzgerald transitions from heavy rain to a "damp mist" which creates a mood that Gatsby has finally given up on waiting for Daisy. The phrase Gatsby says, "Nobody's coming to tea. It's too late!" shows how he feels that Daisy is not coming so he does not have to feel any more nervous than he was. This is shown by the rain transition from heavy rain to mist. Then it went from mist back to heavy rain.

Additionally, the weather motif continues as Daisy pulls into Nick's driveway. When Nick goes to assist Daisy into the house and Gatsby disappears. "[L]oud beating of my own heart I pull the door to the increasing rain" says Nick (Fitzgerald 86). Fitzgerald uses the loud beating of Nick's heart creating an image of suspense. Daisy pulling up to Nick's house unexpectedly brought the nervousness back to Gatsby, as well, which causes him to disappear from the living room and at this exact moment the rain increases. The rain swelling symbolizes the growing anxiety Gatsby anticipating his reunion with Daisy. Gatsby really does not know how to impress Daisy and questions if his wealth and accomplishments are good enough for her now since he, alone, was not good enough for her five years ago. When the awkwardness of Daisy's arrival settles in the scene, Gatsby returns to the house from being in the rain. As he enters, the rain begins to slow. After Gatsby and Daisy talk alone in the living room, their connection begins to revive and reawaken as the weather outside transitions from rain to a sunny, beautiful, and bright day. "It stopped raining," Gatsby tells Daisy, "What do you think of that? It's stopped raining" (Fitzgerald 89). The pleasant weather is a reflection of the optimism Gatsby has at this moment for a bright and happy future with his dream girl, Daisy.

The weather motif is used again when Nick returns to the room where Gatsby and Daisy have to the room Gatsby welcomed him has a stranger and Nick told him “It stopped raining” (Fitzgerald 89). Gatsby tells Daisy “What do you think of that? It’s stopped raining” and he shows them to his house. This is symbolic because it had just started to rain when Daisy arrived because of the unawareness of what Gatsby could say to Daisy. Therefore, the rain stopped raining and the sun started to come out introducing a new path for Gatsby to capture Daisy right into his arms. Throughout the book the weather changed from being just sunny to being extremely hot.

Tom and Gatsby get into an uncontrollable argument over Daisy during the hottest day of the season. “Self-control! [...] I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife” (Fitzgerald 130). This quote is also a weather theme in this novel. It is during the hottest point of the day when Gatsby and Tom are going at it like brothers fighting over a girl. This quote shows how Tom is jealous of Gatsby having an affair with Daisy and he is just now finding out about it. Tom is furious in the way that Daisy tells him to have self-control. Gatsby pops up with a statement and says “Your wife doesn’t love you” (Fitzgerald 130). This creates uncertainty because not only is Tom furious but so is Gatsby. Tom hits him with a “You’re crazy!” (Fitzgerald 131). Being that it is real hot outside, the motif weather connects to how hot the tension is between Tom and Gatsby. They both are at the top of their heads and just blurting out harsh things at each other. We can tell that it is hot because a few pages before a conductor say “Some weather!...Hot!...Hot!...Hot!...Is it hot enough for you? Is it hot? Is it...?” (Fitzgerald 115). This fight settles down and as the days go past, a sudden death happens in the Valley of Ashes.

Once the fight between Tom and Gatsby ended, Daisy and Gatsby drove back to New

York recklessly. “The ‘death car’ as the newspapers called it, didn’t stop; it came out of the gathering darkness” (Fitzgerald 137). This is the point where Daisy is driving wildly on the way back to New York with Gatsby and she hits Myrtle with the car killing her right on the spot. The “gathering darkness” related to Daisy and the car she was driving because as Daisy gets closer and closer to hitting Myrtle Wilson, the darkness starts to get darker and darker, creating a climax of her death. “Myrtle Wilson, her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick dark blood with the dust” (Fitzgerald 137). When it says her dark blood with the dust, Fitzgerald shows how when Daisy pulled off hurriedly around the corner and disappeared into the night just like Myrtle life and her dark blood rights along with it. It also can compare to how her dark blood blended in with the ashes on the ground. It had now become a part of the Valley of Ashes. The darkness in this scene relates to how quick Myrtle died and the sorrow for George’s loss before he even knew it. Fitzgerald’s usages of words during this scene, just like any other scene, really let the readers picture a great image of what really happened. He says the “gathering darkness” and the way he described her life as being “violently extinguished”, meaning that her life is over at the sudden incident. Fitzgerald also describes how she was laid out saying “her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped at the corners” (Fitzgerald 137). It really explains itself, meaning that she has no more life in her. Her death also leads to another harsh death on the first day of autumn.

Another example of the motif, weather, and how it connects to this scene is when Gatsby gets shot by George Wilson laying in his pool on his mattress on the first day of autumn. “The chauffeur [...] heard the shots” (Fitzgerald 161). The shots that the chauffeur heard was the shots of George shooting Gatsby in his pool leaving him laid there like a starfish washed up on the

shore. “The touch of a cluster of leaves revolved it slowly, tracing, like the leg of transit, a thin red circle in the water” (Fitzgerald 162). Fitzgerald uses the “cluster of leaves” to show how his gardener told him that he should drain the pool because the leaves would fall and stop up the drains. The gardener telling Gatsby that the leaves will fall and stop up the drains is symbolic to Gatsby getting shot and his chances with Daisy to be filled and not to be able to be with her. He also uses “thin red circle in the water” to show how Gatsby is dead now and his blood that circles around him is nothing but a little red ring in the water. Fitzgerald adds, “[G]ardener saw Wilson’s body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete” (Fitzgerald 162). Fitzgerald says that the holocaust was complete because now Gatsby was dead and so was the murderer, George Wilson. It being the first day of autumn leaves the readers shocked because autumn is a season of peacefulness and the shot taken to Gatsby during this time interrupted it all leaving him dead in the pool on his mattress. The shot is also symbolic because it shows the attempt to stop time. Gatsby’s love for Daisy has now been completely shut down and his chances to restore the relationship they had years before is over.

In conclusion, Fitzgerald had many trials and tribulations growing up in this time of the 1920s and publishing books that many people had different insights on. He was writing his book *The Great Gatsby* around the time movies were being improved, fashion was getting its name, and the music was entertaining millions of people. In his book, Fitzgerald uses the motif of weather in many different scenes all throughout it. He matches the scene with weather, whether it had a lot of tension and hot weather or whether it was calm and breezy weather. He then compares and contrasts how they both relate to each other. Fitzgerald lets the readers know throughout his whole book that people should be careful with what they say because it could lead to a greater conflict. Fitzgerald showed his readers back then and his readers today how the use

of the motif of weather consistently appears differently in all his settings giving his readers something in advance to look for. This book has been a moving effect from generation to generation and is still being read today.

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