ISSN Online: 3006-4708
ISSN Print: 3006-4694
SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW ARCHIVES
https://policyjournalofms.com

From James Gatz to Jay Gatsby: Proto-Posthuman Identity and Capitalist Self-Engineering in The Great Gatsby

Rafea Bukhari
English Literature Department, University of Balochistan, Quetta. Email: syyeda.rafea.bukhari@gmail.com

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1733

Abstract
This study explores the transformation of James Gatz into Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as an early example of constructed identity. Rather than treating Gatsby's reinvention only as a pursuit of the American Dream, the article argues that his self-creation reflects a form of capitalist self-engineering. Drawing on Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg, Gatsby is interpreted as an "analog cyborg," a figure shaped not by digital technology but by disciplined habits, consumption, and social performance. By reshaping his behavior, speech, appearance, and invented background, he approaches identity as something that can be designed and improved rather than something naturally given. The interpretation is further supported by cultural theories of discipline, performance, and consumption, which explain how modern society forms identity through routine conduct, public display, and social recognition. Using qualitative close textual analysis informed by a New Historicist perspective, the study examines Gatsby's "General Resolves," regulated routines, and carefully staged public image. These practices reveal a pattern of efficiency and self-regulation similar to modern ideas of self-optimization. Wealth, material objects, and spectacle function as social mechanisms that temporarily allow Gatsby to appear to cross class boundaries and gain legitimacy. His persona therefore emerges as a hybrid formation produced through the interaction of personal effort and the economic and cultural structures of modern society. The article argues that Fitzgerald's novel anticipates later concerns about unstable identity and constructed subjectivity. Gatsby's downfall demonstrates the limits of self-creation. Although identity can be performed and reshaped, it cannot fully erase social history or inherited hierarchy. The novel therefore offers a pre-digital exploration of technologically organized subjectivity and suggests that the desire to improve and redesign the self originates within capitalist modernity rather than contemporary biotechnology.

Keywords: Proto-posthumanism, Self-engineering; Cyborg identity, Capitalism and subjectivity, Material culture, Performativity; Modernity, *The Great Gatsby*

Introduction

The period of the 1920s, frequently described as the "Jazz Age," marked a decisive transformation in American social and cultural life. Rapid industrial expansion, the consolidation of consumer capitalism, and the growth of urban modernity transformed not only economic structures but also prevailing understandings of social value and identity (Berman, 1982; Lears, 1994). During this period, the nineteenth-century conception of the self as a stable moral essence increasingly gave way to a modern subject shaped by performance, visibility, and social mobility. Warren Susman (1984) observes that the shift from a "culture of character" to a "culture of personality" reoriented legitimacy away from inherited virtue and towards the managed presentation of the self. Within this emerging cultural framework, identity became something

cultivated, displayed, and evaluated within public space.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) remains one of the most compelling literary representations of this transformation. Critical tradition has long treated Jay Gatsby as an emblem of the American Dream, emphasizing his romantic idealism and tragic pursuit of upward mobility (Trilling, 1950; Bruccoli, 2000). Subsequent scholarship has explored the novel's critique of capitalist aspiration and its exposure of entrenched class hierarchies (Bewley, 1954; Tyson, 2006). However, comparatively less attention has been given to the internal mechanics of Gatsby's transformation itself. His ascent is not merely economic, it is the result of deliberate self-fashioning. Gatsby does not simply acquire wealth rather he reconstructs his identity through disciplined habit, cultivated speech, strategic consumption, and narrative reinvention.

This article handles Gatsby's transformation through the lens of posthumanist theory, particularly Donna Haraway's (1991) concept of the cyborg. Haraway defines the cyborg as a hybrid figure that unsettles traditional boundaries between organism and system, nature and construction. While Fitzgerald's novel predicts digital technology, Gatsby's self-creation anticipates this hybridity. His identity is neither purely inherited nor entirely fabricated rather, it is assembled through social practices, economic structures, and symbolic performance. In this sense, Gatsby may be understood as a proto-posthuman subject, an "analog cyborg" whose selfhood is produced through cultural mechanisms rather than biological continuity.

The socio-economic conditions of the 1920s provide the historical foundation for this interpretation. The rise of advertising culture and the expansion of consumer spectacle encouraged individuals to craft public identities aligned with aspiration and visibility (Lears, 1994; Churchwell, 2013). At the same time, the principles of Frederick Winslow Taylor's Scientific Management introduced a model of efficiency, discipline, and optimization that extended beyond industrial production into broader cultural life (Taylor, 1911; Banta, 1993). Gatsby's "General Resolves" (p. 173). and regimented routines suggest that he internalizes a comparable logic of self-regulation, treating identity as a project to be refined and perfected over time.

By synthesizing posthumanist theory with the cultural history of early twentieth-century capitalism, this study argues that *The Great Gatsby* foreshadows contemporary concerns about constructed subjectivity. Gatsby's trajectory reveals both the possibilities and the limits of deliberate self-engineering in a society that promotes identity reconstruction while preserving structural inequality. The novel therefore extends beyond a critique of the American Dream to offer a sustained meditation on the engineered self, a figure shaped by performance, discipline, consumption, and narrative reconstruction within the machinery of modernity.

Literature Review

Since its publication in 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has provoked critical discussion, with scholars continually reconsidering its themes and cultural importance. Early criticism primarily approached the novel as a reflection on the American Dream and the tension between aspiration and materialism. Lionel Trilling (1950) characterizes Gatsby as a figure marked by a "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (p. 250), implying that his dream, rather than his fortune, constitutes the moral center of the narrative. He further suggests that Gatsby's power lies in "his capacity for wonder" (p. 251), which distinguishes him from the spiritually diminished society around him. Likewise, Bruccoli (2000) interprets Gatsby as an idealist whose devotion to possibility separates him from the morally careless community he inhabits, describing him as a figure animated by "extraordinary hope" (p. 217). Gatsby's tragedy does not stem from corruption but from the impossibility of sustaining romantic idealism in a materialistic environment. Mid-century critics redirected attention toward the novel's social and economic framework. Bewley (1954) states that Fitzgerald exposes the illusion of upward mobility in American capitalism, arguing that Gatsby's wealth "cannot purchase admission into the world of inherited privilege" (p. 235). The novel therefore demonstrates that financial success cannot erase entrenched class divisions. Marxist-influenced interpretations further emphasize the opposition between old money and new money, viewing Gatsby's failure as a structural outcome of inherited privilege rather than personal weakness. Tyson (2006) similarly states that American

ideology promotes belief in equal opportunity while concealing inequality, explaining that literature often reveals "how power and privilege are maintained by dominant social groups" (p. 54). In this perspective, Gatsby's wealth grants him proximity to elite society but never genuine acceptance, reinforcing the rigidity of East Egg's class boundaries.

More recent scholarship has turned to the issue of identity formation in modern culture. Cultural historian Warren Susman (1984) identifies the early twentieth century as a shift from a nineteenth-century "culture of character" to a twentieth-century "culture of personality" (p. 271), in which "the personality became a social performance" (p. 276). Critics have applied this framework to Fitzgerald's work, interpreting Gatsby's speech, manners, and lifestyle as carefully written presentations intended to secure legitimacy (Person, 2007). Churchwell (2013) similarly places the novel within the rise of consumer culture, arguing that the 1920s encouraged Americans to invent and advertise themselves through spectacle and display. Gatsby's parties, clothing, and mansion therefore operate not only as symbols of wealth but also as instruments of self-presentation. Scholars have also explored the relationship between modernity and subjectivity in the novel. Berman (1982) links modern experience with instability and reinvention, describing modern life as a condition in which "all that is solid melts into air" (p. 15). Fitzgerald's characters embody this instability, particularly Gatsby, whose identity depends upon continuous performance and narrative control. Lears (1994) in the same manner demonstrates that early twentieth-century advertising promoted personal transformation, promising individuals the possibility of becoming new men and women through consumption. Within this cultural environment, Gatsby's transformation from James Gatz into Jay Gatsby may be understood as participation in a broader ideology of self-manufacture.

Despite these insights, comparatively little criticism has examined Gatsby's transformation through posthumanist theory. Although scholars recognize his identity as constructed, they typically interpret the process in psychological, moral, or socio-economic terms. Donna Haraway's (1991) concept of the cyborg, which challenges the boundary between natural and constructed identity, offers a new framework for reconsidering Gatsby's self-fashioning. Haraway describes the cyborg as a "hybrid of machine and organism" (p. 149), a figure that destabilizes the idea of an original, unified self. From this perspective, Gatsby appears as a hybrid subject shaped by discipline, performance, and material mediation. His persona depends upon economic, social, and symbolic systems that allow him to fabricate legitimacy beyond his origins. Accordingly, this study builds upon earlier discussions of class, performance, and consumer culture but addresses a specific theoretical gap in Gatsby criticism. Rather than viewing the novel solely as a moral commentary on the American Dream or a sociological study of class hierarchy, the article interprets Gatsby's transformation as an early representation of technologically mediated subjectivity. By combining posthumanist theory with the historical context of early twentieth-century capitalism, the study argues that *The Great Gatsby* anticipates later concerns about engineered identity and the instability of the authentic self.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in Donna Haraway's posthumanist discourse, particularly her concept of the cyborg as a figure that destabilizes traditional boundaries between the natural and the constructed self (Haraway, 1991). Within this perspective, Jay Gatsby is interpreted not as a conventional romantic hero but as an analog cyborg, a subject whose identity exists between the organic born self and the socially manufactured made self. Haraway characterizes the cyborg as a hybrid of organism and system, operating simultaneously as lived reality and cultural fiction. Extending this notion to the early twentieth century, the study proposes that capitalist modernity functions as the enabling structure through which identity can be deliberately reconstructed (Berman, 1982; Rose, 1999). Gatsby's transformation therefore represents a form of self-design in which personal history, behavior, and appearance are consciously reorganized to produce a socially legitimate identity.

To clarify the operational logic behind this transformation, the framework incorporates Frederick Winslow

Taylor's theory of Scientific Management. Taylorism emphasized efficiency, discipline, and the elimination of wasted effort in industrial labour (Taylor, 1911). Cultural historians have demonstrated that these principles gradually extended beyond the factory into everyday life and individual conduct (Banta, 1993). This process can also be understood through Michel Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power, which explains how modern societies produce self-regulating subjects through routines, surveillance, and internalized control. Gatsby's childhood "General Resolves" and carefully regulated routines exemplify such self-discipline, indicating that he addresses identity as a project requiring continuous improvement and regulation (Fitzgerald, p. 173). Rather than signifying simple ambition, these practices reveal the internalization of industrial rationality within personal behavior.

The framework further draws upon theories of consumption and performance to explain how Gatsby's identity gains social legitimacy. Thorstein Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption demonstrates how status in modern societies is displayed through visible expenditure and luxury goods. Gatsby's mansion, extravagant parties, and elaborate clothing therefore function as social signals rather than merely personal possessions. Similarly, Guy Debord's (1967) concept of the "society of the spectacle" clarifies how social relations become mediated through images and appearances (p. 12). Gatsby's public persona depends upon spectacle, performance, and the management of visibility. Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity further supports this interpretation by suggesting that identity is not innate but produced through repeated social acts. Gatsby's adopted speech, gestures, and manners thus operate as performative practices that sustain the illusion of an aristocratic self.

By synthesizing Haraway's posthumanism with Taylor's efficiency model and broader theories of discipline, consumption, and performance, this framework interprets Gatsby's eventual collapse not simply as romantic failure but as the limitation of a constructed identity confronted by an irreducible past. The novel reveals how capitalist modernity encourages individuals to fashion themselves as projects of improvement while simultaneously exposing the instability of such manufactured subjectivity.

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodological design grounded in close textual analysis and informed by a New Historicist perspective. The primary analytical procedure involves a sustained close reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* in order to examine how the narrative constructs Jay Gatsby's identity through recurring patterns of imagery, description, and social performance. Close reading, as a central practice of literary interpretation, requires careful attention to figurative language, narrative detail, and repeated motifs to understand how meaning operates within the text. Brooks (1947) emphasizes that literary analysis must attend to "the internal organization of the poem itself" (p. 192), while Tyson (2006) similarly notes that close reading focuses on how language "produces meaning through its structure and patterns" (p. 137). Following this approach, the present study concentrates on symbolic expression, disciplined habits, and narrative commentary that present Gatsby as a consciously fashioned persona rather than a naturally inherited self.

The New Historicist framework situates the novel within the cultural and material realities of the 1920s. Instead of treating historical documents as external evidence, New Historicism understands literary and non-literary texts as participating in the same cultural discourse. Greenblatt (1980) describes literary works as shaped by "a circulation of social energy" (p. 6), and Gallagher and Greenblatt (2001) explain that texts and historical practices exist within shared cultural systems of meaning. Consequently, developments such as consumer advertising, personality culture, and post World War I bodily reconstruction practices are examined alongside the novel to demonstrate how modern society increasingly understood identity as something capable of being constructed, improved, and publicly displayed. In this framework, literature is interpreted both as a product of its historical conditions and as an active participant in the ideological processes of its time. Montrose (1989) characterizes this relation as the "reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the

textuality of history" (p. 20)

The study also employs a comparative reading of major characters. Tom and Daisy Buchanan represent inherited privilege and stable class identity, while Gatsby embodies constructed and performative subjectivity. By contrasting these figures, the research interprets Gatsby's transformation as a form of disciplined self-fashioning consistent with the logic of capitalist modernity. This interpretation is guided by posthumanist and cultural theory, particularly the view that modern subjectivity emerges through regulation and performance. Haraway (1991) explains that the cyborg challenges fixed identity categories by blurring boundaries between natural and constructed existence, while Foucault (1977) argues that modern society produces subjects through "discipline" and the formation of "docile bodies" governed by routines and internalized control (p. 136).

Within this interpretive framework, the study does not attempt empirical verification; rather, it seeks to offer a coherent and theoretically grounded reading of the novel. The objective is to connect Fitzgerald's literary representation to broader cultural processes of modernization and identity formation, demonstrating how the narrative reflects changing conceptions of the self in early twentieth-century society.

Analysis and Discussion

I. Self-Fashioning and Performed Identity

Fitzgerald presents Jay Gatsby first through his actions and behavior, leaving his personal history initially obscured. Nick Carraway's earliest description emphasizes performance rather than essence, noting that "if personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him" (Fitzgerald, p. 2). The statement replaces inner character with visible action. Gatsby's identity appears not as an inherent quality but as an effect produced through behavior. Such emphasis reflects what Greenblatt (1980) calls self-fashioning, a process in which identity is deliberately constructed through socially legible signs. Gatsby does not merely possess a personality rather he assembles one. Nick's comparison of Gatsby to "one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away" (p. 2) further underscores this constructed responsiveness. The metaphor does not literally mechanize Gatsby but highlights his heightened alignment with social perception. Gatsby carefully monitors reactions and modifies his conduct accordingly. His smile, offering a "quality of eternal reassurance" (p. 48), functions less as spontaneous expression than as communicative performance. Erving Goffman (1959) describes social interaction as a form of presentation in which individuals manage impressions before an audience. Gatsby's smile reflects impression management because it anticipates approval and helps others feel reassured. Identity here emerges relationally, shaped through interaction rather than inherited origin. Language reinforces this process. Gatsby's repeated address "old sport" (p. 48), operates as a linguistic marker of class affiliation. Nick observes that Gatsby's speech contains "elaborate formalities" (p. 52), suggesting conscious regulation rather than natural expression. The phrase functions as a performative sign intended to align him with aristocratic culture. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity helps explain this pattern because identity is formed through repeated actions rather than emerging from an inner essence. Gatsby's speech, gestures, and manners are therefore not superficial decorations but mechanisms through which a social identity is enacted and maintained.

This sense of performed identity is also evident in Gatsby's self-narration. Gatsby provides Nick with a carefully composed biography, claiming to be "the son of some wealthy people in the "Middle West" and "educated at Oxford" (p. 65). Nick perceives hesitation, noting the account sounded "hurried" and rehearsed (p. 65). The biography functions as narrative legitimation. Ricoeur (1984) argues that individuals create identity through narrative continuity, constructing coherence by telling a story about themselves. Gatsby's story tries to give him the family background he does not have, so his past becomes something he invents rather than something he remembers. Haraway's (1991) concept of the cyborg illuminates this instability. The cyborg destabilizes the boundary between the natural and the constructed self, emphasizing hybrid subjectivity formed through cultural systems. Gatsby also stands between his real origins and his created

identity, as James Gatz still exists beneath the persona of Jay Gatsby.

Consumer culture intensifies this transformation, as advertising linked commodities with personal improvement and social mobility (Lears, 1994; Marchand, 1985). When Gatsby meets Daisy wearing a "white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie" (p. 89), appearance becomes a medium of social communication. Yet performance remains dependent on recognition. Tom Buchanan's accusation that Gatsby is a "common swindler" (p. 135) destabilizes the persona because identity requires collective validation. Bourdieu's (1984) idea of social capital helps explain this moment, since status depends not only on wealth but also on social recognition. Gatsby has money, yet he lacks inherited legitimacy, so others can easily stop believing in his identity. Fitzgerald portrays identity as a continuous process of self-fashioning, yet he also reveals its limits. A performed persona may convince others for a time, but it cannot ultimately overcome deeply rooted class distinctions.

II. Discipline, Self-Regulation, and the Taylorist Self

The clearest evidence of Gatsby's deliberate self-construction appears in the "General Resolves" found by his father after his death. Written in the back of a copy of *Hopalong Cassidy*, the list outlines a strict daily routine, including "Rise from bed 6.00 A.M.," "Exercise and wall-scaling 6.15–6.30," and "Study needed inventions 7.00–9.00" (Fitzgerald, p. 173). Rather than expressing aspiration alone, the list reveals an organized attempt to regulate time, body, and behavior. The young James Gatz approaches identity not as inheritance but as disciplined practice. His future persona is imagined as something to be produced through routine.

A useful comparison can be drawn with Frederick Winslow Taylor's theory of Scientific Management. He argued that efficiency could be achieved by carefully measuring and organizing each movement of work, thereby eliminating wasted effort through systematic planning (Taylor, 1911). Although formulated for industrial production, these principles increasingly influenced everyday conduct (Banta, 1993). Gatsby's schedule reflects this same logic. His day is broken into carefully timed routines, and self-improvement becomes an ongoing discipline. He begins to treat his own life almost like a project to be refined and perfected. This corresponds to Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power. Gatsby's self-imposed rules such as "No wasting time," "No more smoking or chewing," and "Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it" (p. 173) illustrate internalized discipline. There is no visible authority enforcing these rules, yet he closely monitors himself. The schedule turns into a form of personal self-surveillance, foreshadowing modern cultures of self-improvement.

The focus on refined speech suggests that belonging in elite society requires controlled behavior and polished expression. Voice and manner become trainable instruments, aligning with Susman's (1984) argument that personality culture rewarded charm and managed appearance over inherited moral character. Yet the list is signed "James Gatz," showing the distance between his real background and the identity he hopes to achieve. Haraway's (1991) idea of the cyborg helps explain this situation. Identity is formed through change and reconstruction rather than biological inheritance. Yet discipline alone cannot ensure social acceptance. Gatsby's routines generate competence but not acceptance. Bourdieu (1984) explains that symbolic legitimacy cannot be gained through effort alone. It depends on social recognition, and that recognition remains unequal.

III. Conspicuous Consumption, Spectacle, and Manufactured Legitimacy

Gatsby's identity does not rely solely on discipline and performance, it also depends upon material display. His social status is communicated through material display, buildings, and public show. Nick first describes the mansion as a "colossal affair" and a "factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy" (Fitzgerald, p. 5). The house is not merely a residence but a constructed symbol, suggesting that legitimacy is achieved through replication rather than inherited lineage.

Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption provides a useful framework for interpreting this pattern. Veblen (1899) argues that status is communicated through visible expenditure, in which goods operate as markers of

prestige beyond practical function. Gatsby's parties operate in precisely this way. Nick observes that "every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived" and that the guests "conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park" (p. 39). The consumption is excessive and impersonal, many guests do not even know the host. The parties therefore function less as social intimacy than as public advertising of wealth. The reunion with Daisy shows how objects mediate emotion. Gatsby throws "shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel" before her, and Daisy responds, "It makes me sad because I've never seen such, such beautiful shirts before" (p. 92). The emotional intensity attaches to commodities as proof of transformation. Here, economic capital converts into romantic and social value.

Debord's (1967) idea of the "society of the spectacle" helps explain how outward appearance becomes more important than inner reality. Nick describes the party world as a scene where "men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars" (p. 39). The imagery stresses visual attraction rather than human connection. Gatsby's car works in the same way as a visible sign of wealth. Nick describes it as "a rich cream color, bright with nickel" and "monstrous in length" (p. 64). Objects speak before Gatsby does. Yet the spectacle remains unstable, because it depends on others' interpretation. Tom's dismissal "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (p. 130) exposes the limit of Gatsby's performance. Wealth may imitate social rank, but it cannot guarantee acceptance. What impresses some observers appears tasteless to others, so spectacle creates attention but not belonging.

IV. The Limits of Constructed Identity: Memory, Class, and the Collapse of the Self

The Plaza Hotel confrontation marks the moment when Gatsby's constructed identity meets direct resistance. Tom challenges not Gatsby's present behavior but his origin, calling him "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (Fitzgerald, p. 130). The statement denies legitimacy, reasserting class identity as genealogical rather than performative. The conflict deepens when Gatsby demands Daisy declare she "never loved" Tom (p. 132). Daisy's reply, "I did love him once, but I loved you too" (p. 132), shows the limits of Gatsby's dream. Identity cannot be made secure by denying the past, because memory does not disappear.

Gatsby's famous insistence, "Can't repeat the past? … Why of course you can!" (p. 110), expresses a belief that identity can be reconstructed through will, but the novel repeatedly contradicts this. Ricoeur (1984) argues that narrative identity is shaped by time and continuity, Gatsby attempts to rewrite narrative without accepting temporal irreversibility. When Nick observes that after the season ended "no one came" (p. 114), the narrative shows how recognition was never truly personal, it was attached to spectacle. Once spectacle fades, social validation withdraws.

Gatsby's death intensifies this collapse. Waiting for Daisy's call, he "must have felt that he had lost the old warm world" (p. 161). The line suggests a deeper sense of loss because the social world he created can no longer give his life meaning. Haraway's (1991) concept of the cyborg helps explain this failure, since a hybrid identity survives only when the social, symbolic, and economic networks supporting it remain intact. Once these networks withdraw, the constructed self becomes unsustainable. Fitzgerald's final reflection, "boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (p. 180), confirms that aspiration encounters historical constraint. Gatsby represents the modern attempt to create oneself, yet he also shows its limits. A person may shape a new identity, but social class and the passage of time still place boundaries on that effort.

V. Temporal Engineering and the Impossible Program: Gatsby as a Posthuman Subject of Time

While Gatsby attempts to reconstruct identity through discipline and spectacle, his most radical project is not social but temporal. Gatsby does not merely wish to improve his future; he seeks to redesign time itself. His declaration, "Can't repeat the past? … Why of course you can!" (p. 110), frames memory as something editable, as if the past were a script that can be re-run. Paul Ricoeur (1984) explains that personal identity is tied to time and story. People understand themselves through a connection between past, present, and future. Gatsby refuses this connection. He does not accept time as moving forward and instead believes the past can

be brought back. Daisy is therefore not only someone he loves. She becomes the moment he wants to return to. Nick recognizes this when he observes that Gatsby "wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (p. 110). Gatsby's target is not only Daisy but an earlier configuration of the self.

This temporal fixation aligns Gatsby with a proto-posthuman logic. Katherine Hayles (1999) argues that posthuman identity is often imagined through the belief that information patterns can be separated from material embodiment. Gatsby behaves as though the feelings and hopes of his earlier life can be carried over into his new identity as the wealthy Jay Gatsby. The past becomes data, and wealth becomes the mechanism that might restore it. The green light functions as a symbolic interface of this temporal system. Nick sees Gatsby stretching "his arms toward the dark water… trembling" (p. 21). The light is distant and abstract, less a tangible goal than a signal. Leo Marx (1964) observes that the American technological imagination often links hope with visible symbols, and the green light captures this union of mediation and desire.

Time cannot be engineered. During the reunion scene, Nick notes that "there must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams" (p. 95). The problem is not simply Daisy's behavior, but the impossibility of making embodied reality match idealized memory. Henri Bergson's theory of duration clarifies this failure. Bergson (1911) distinguishes lived time (duree) from measurable clock time. Gatsby treats time as mechanical, something he believes can be reset, but real experience cannot be undone. The five years separating Gatsby and Daisy cannot be deleted because time alters consciousness itself.

Gatsby's death exposes the collapse of this temporal program. Waiting beside the pool for Daisy's call, he "must have felt that he had lost the old warm world" (p. 161). The loss is both emotional and temporal because the "warm world" existed mainly in Gatsby's imagined memory. The novel's closing lines, "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (p. 180), show the condition his story represents. People try to move forward, but the past continues to pull them back.

VI. Narrative Mediation and the Constructed Self

If Gatsby is a constructed identity within the fictional world, he is equally a constructed figure within narrative form. His existence depends upon Nick Carraway's mediation. Gatsby never presents himself to the reader directly or continuously; instead, he appears through recollection, interpretation, and selective narration. Nick announces that he is "inclined to reserve all judgments" (p. 1), yet his descriptions shape the reader's moral orientation. He names Gatsby as possessing "an extraordinary gift for hope" (p. 2), elevating him beyond ordinary categories. Wayne Booth (1961) notes that narrators guide readers through rhetorical framing, and Nick's language encourages admiration even before Gatsby's full history appears.

This narrative mediation complicates the notion of authenticity. Derrida (1978) argues that meaning does not appear as pure presence but is always mediated through signs. Gatsby's identity is precisely such mediation: even the name "Jay Gatsby" is a sign-system overwriting James Gatz. Nick acknowledges the designed quality of Gatsby's self when he describes it as "his Platonic conception of himself" (p. 98). Gatsby tries to inhabit an abstract model rather than a lived continuity. Baudrillard's (1981) idea of simulacra helps explain this effect. Gatsby's persona does not simply conceal his real background. Instead, it starts to operate as the reality people recognize and accept. Gatsby's speech further reveals instability. Nick observes that Gatsby "hurried the phrase 'educated at Oxford,' or swallowed it" (p. 65), as if language cannot fully stabilize the identity it asserts. Hesitation interrupts coherence, revealing a gap between narrative claim and lived reality. Hayles (1999) suggests that posthuman identity shifts from embodied presence to informational pattern. Gatsby anticipates this condition because his existence ultimately survives through narrative reconstruction. After his death, Nick assembles Gatsby's story from rumour, testimony, and memory; the Gatsby who persists becomes textual rather than physical. After the funeral this change becomes clear, "No one came" (p. 174). The crowd that once supported Gatsby's image disappears. Without Nick's storytelling Gatsby would fade both socially and symbolically. Foucault (1969) explains that identity is formed through systems of representation rather

than an inner essence. Gatsby's reputation grows out of stories about him, including the rumor that "he killed a man once" (p. 44). These stories do not simply misrepresent Gatsby. They actually create the figure people believe him to be.

The novel closes with Nick's reflection that "Gatsby believed in the green light" (p. 180). Gatsby's final identity is therefore not an unmediated self but a narrated meaning. In this sense Gatsby becomes fully posthuman. He is no longer a stable biological person but a figure put together through performance, memory, and storytelling. Gatsby constructs himself in life, yet narration ultimately preserves him. Identity in modernity is secured less by origin than by inscription within story.

Conclusion

This study shows that the change of James Gatz into Jay Gatsby is not only a search for higher social status or romantic success. It is a long and careful effort to remake the self within the culture of the early twentieth century. A close examination of the novel indicates that identity is not treated as something natural or fixed but as something a person actively forms. Gatsby carefully manages his behaviour, speech, and manners to appear believable. He disciplines his body and controls his daily schedule in the hope of improving himself. He uses wealth, his grand house, and public display to turn money into social respect. He even tries to reshape his memories so that he can return to a former version of his life. Through these actions, identity appears made rather than inherited.

From a posthumanist viewpoint, Gatsby may be read as an early form of a posthuman figure. He treats the self as flexible and changeable in different social settings. His identity depends on acting, storytelling, and visual display rather than birth or family background. In this sense, Fitzgerald points toward later concerns about how identity can be separated from origin, how narrative helps maintain a sense of self, and how disciplined effort promises personal perfection. Gatsby does not simply accept who he is. He intentionally constructs a new self, reflecting a modern faith in reinvention, order, and public image. At the same time, the novel makes clear that this project has limits. Gatsby's image exists only as long as others believe in it. His habits cannot remove his class background, his money cannot secure true belonging, and his wish to relive the past fails because time cannot move backward. After his death, the public image disappears but continues in the story told about him, suggesting that identity survives more in memory than in physical presence. The novel therefore presents a key tension of modern life. Society encourages people to remake themselves, yet class divisions and personal history block complete transformation.

By moving away from simple moral readings of the American Dream and focusing instead on how identity is formed, this study offers a different way to understand *The Great Gatsby*. The novel becomes an early study of the made self and the uncertainty of authenticity. Long before the age of social media and online self-presentation, Fitzgerald imagined a character who believed he could rebuild himself entirely. The lasting importance of the novel lies in its recognition that although individuals try to reshape who they are, memory, history, and social structures still place boundaries around them. Gatsby's belief in the green light expresses both the dream of total renewal and the reality that such renewal can never be fully achieved.

Future Research Recommendations

This study suggests several directions for future research. Scholars may compare Fitzgerald's novel with other modernist works such as *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf and *Passing* by Nella Larsen to explore how identity is shaped through performance within systems of gender and race. Such comparisons would show how different writers portray the pressures placed on individuals to adapt themselves within restrictive social environments.

Further research could also bring this discussion into dialogue with contemporary digital culture. Today, people carefully manage their public image through social media, online platforms, and virtual spaces. Examining these modern practices alongside Gatsby's self-creation would highlight striking similarities

between early twentieth-century self-presentation and present-day identity construction. This kind of interdisciplinary approach would strengthen the argument that *The Great Gatsby* speaks directly to ongoing concerns about curated identities, digital visibility, and the growing influence of technology on how individuals understand themselves.

References

Banta, M. (1993). *Taylored lives: Narrative productions in the age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford*. University of Chicago Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1981). *Simulacra and simulation*. Éditions Galilée.

Bergson, H. (1911). *Creative evolution* (A. Mitchell, Trans.). Henry Holt.

Berman, M. (1982). *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity*. Penguin.

Bewley, M. (1954). Scott Fitzgerald's criticism of America. *The Sewanee Review, 62*(2), 223–246.

Booth, W. C. (1961). *The rhetoric of fiction*. University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Brooks, C. (1947). *The well wrought urn: Studies in the structure of poetry*. Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Bruccoli, M. J. (2000). *Some sort of epic grandeur: The life of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (2nd ed.). University of South Carolina Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Churchwell, S. (2013). *Careless people: Murder, mayhem, and the invention of The Great Gatsby*. Penguin.

Debord, G. (1994). *The society of the spectacle* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Zone Books. (Original work published 1967).

Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Fitzgerald, F. S. (2004). *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner. (Original work published 1925).

Foucault, M. (1969). What is an author? In D. F. Bouchard (Ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice* (pp. 113–138). Cornell University Press.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon.

Gallagher, C., & Greenblatt, S. (2001). *Practicing New Historicism*. University of Chicago Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor Books.

Greenblatt, S. (1980). *Renaissance self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. University of Chicago Press.

Haraway, D. (1991). A cyborg manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century. In *Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature* (pp. 149–181). Routledge.

Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. University of Chicago Press.

Lears, T. J. Jackson. (1994). *Fables of abundance: A cultural history of advertising in America*. Basic Books.

Marchand, R. (1985). *Advertising the American dream: Making way for modernity, 1920–1940*. University of California Press.

Marx, L. (1964). *The machine in the garden: Technology and the pastoral ideal in America*. Oxford University Press.

Montrose, L. A. (1989). Professing the Renaissance: The poetics and politics of culture. In H. A. Veeser (Ed.), *The new historicism* (pp. 15–36). Routledge.

Person, L. S. (2007). Herstory and history: The female subject in *The Great Gatsby*. *American Literature, 50*(2), 250–257.

Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and narrative* (Vol. 1, K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* (2nd ed.). Free Association Books.

Susman, W. I. (1984). *Culture as history: The transformation of American society in the twentieth century*.

Pantheon.
Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. Harper & Brothers.
Trilling, L. (1950). F. Scott Fitzgerald. In *The liberal imagination* (pp. 244–254). Viking Press.
Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*. Macmillan.