Gatsby’s Mentors: Queer Relations Between Love and Money in *The Great Gatsby*

This essay examines relationships between men and the role patriarchal capitalism plays in the construction of sexuality in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), a novel written during a critical period in the history of sexuality, as well as of gay and lesbian history. The ambivalence about male bonds—in particular the simultaneously loving and abusive dynamics of mentoring—depicted in this canonical work of American literature reveals the author’s unease about his relationship with Catholic priest and teacher Sigourney Fay and provides insight into the author’s well-known lifelong anxiety about his gender and sexuality.

**Keywords:** F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, relationships (or friendship), economics, mentoring, sexuality, abuse

The HBO series *Entourage*, which premiered in 2004, is a show about men’s friendships. Ostensibly based on the experience of executive producer Mark Wahlberg, it has at its center movie star Vincent Chase (Adrien Grenier) and a group of his friends from Queens, New York who moved west with him and support his career. Centering on life in Los Angeles and the business of entertainment, *Entourage* illuminates the economics of the film industry. The series began with each of Vince’s friends performing some kind of personal service: Eric (Kevin Connolly) as his manager, Turtle (Jerry Ferrara), as his driver, and half-brother Johnny “Drama” (Kevin Dillon) as his personal chef—all of them living with Vince in his palatial Beverly Hills homes. The series itself focuses on the “business” of the men’s lives, as each strives to become independent of Vince: E. takes on additional clients, Turtle pursues entrepreneurial ventures, and Drama reignites his own acting career.

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1 The lead cast is rounded out by powerful Hollywood elders including agents Ari Gold (Jeremy Piven) and Terrance McQuewick (Malcolm McDowell), the father of Éric’s fiancée, Sloan (Emmanuelle Chriqui).
Oddly, for a show about the life of an actor, *Entourage* almost never shows Vince acting. Instead the show follows Vince as he does the work associated with movie stardom that is ancillary to acting itself: promoting movies, reading scripts, campaigning for roles, and so on. Each season begins with Vince having just completed a project. Sometimes the viewer learns quite a bit about a film, perhaps even seeing a trailer or clips, as is the case with *Queens Boulevard* and *Medellin*. In the fifth season, Vince and his team scramble to get him any kind of role at all after the spectacular failure of the Pablo Escobar biopic. In the last minutes of the finale comes a stunning, unexpected offer from Martin Scorsese to have Vince star in his next production. The sixth season opens with Vince’s career revitalized, but the viewer learns almost nothing about the film except its title: *Gatsby*.

Of course, the title is all we need.² F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, published in 1925, is also a story about the pursuit of the American Dream. Narrator Nick Carraway tells the story of a summer among the wealthy and privileged; a stockbroker of limited means, Nick socializes with his cousin Daisy and her wealthy husband Tom Buchanan (with whom Nick graduated from Yale); Daisy’s girlhood friend, professional golfer Jordan Baker; and his Long Island neighbor, Jay Gatsby, a host of raucous parties in the fictitious “West Egg.” Nick, Jordan, Gatsby, and Daisy plot to have Daisy leave Tom for Gatsby. The plan is thwarted when Tom’s mistress Myrtle is killed by Gatsby’s car (driven, Nick believes, by Daisy), an event which leads her husband, Tom’s mechanic, George, to murder Gatsby. As narrator, Nick is less focused on this romance plot than on Gatsby himself and what Gatsby can teach him about his own situation. Nick has come East, he tells us at the start of the novel, to learn the bond business; later he indicates that he’s also in New York so that he may enjoy the company of men and to escape the increasing social expectations back in the Midwest, where he is being cajoled to marry. As it unfolds for Nick, Gatsby’s story—his road to West Egg and to the wealth, power, and privilege he enjoys there—is about coming to terms with an American social order delimited by patriarchal capitalism in which there is little possibility for authentic love or desire separate from the economic realm.

Like *Entourage*, *The Great Gatsby* is a story about the achievement of the American Dream throughentrée into a world of men, but in Fitzgerald’s critique, men’s relationships consist of political and business connections—and especially of the mentoring of young men by older men—rather than friendship or love. In telling this story Fitzgerald draws on two powerful cultural myths about how boys become men and thereby

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² The series is filled with Hollywood-insider jokes, and the Gatsby storyline contains a few ironies the literati will recognize, as well: Vince is desperate to be hired because of the spectacular failure of *Medellin*, a project for which he rejected a script based on an Edith Wharton novel (Wharton was of course a contemporary of Fitzgerald’s—and it was Scorsese who directed the adaptation of *The Age of Innocence*, another of her novels); also, it’s entirely appropriate that the “second act” of Vince’s career is ushered in by *The Great Gatsby*, given Fitzgerald’s oft-quoted note that “There are no second acts in American lives” (an observation the irony of which so many have remarked on: after all, Americans love a comeback story, as Fitzgerald himself, whose career was marked by alternating great successes and failures, understood well).
gain access to wealth, power, and privilege: the Horatio Alger story and Petronius’s *Satyricon* (or, more accurately, the story of Trimalchio). These allusions establish a context for Nick’s telling of Gatsby’s story and thus, too, for Fitzgerald’s critique. Ultimately, the novel’s treatment of these themes reflects a similar ambivalence about mentoring and the world of men that is visible throughout Fitzgerald’s life.

**THE HORATIO ALGER STORY: MENTORING AND THE AMERICAN DREAM**

The life story that Nick relates ends at its beginning, with the revelation sometime after Gatsby’s funeral even that his friend was known in boyhood as “Jimmy Gatz,” that he followed a program of self-improvement straight out of Ben Franklin’s autobiography, and that the desire for wealth that grew with maturation helped to transform the teenager James Gatz he describes in the middle of the novel into the rich party host Jay Gatsby he meets at the beginning. That transformation follows a pattern well established in 19th-century American boys’ culture through the stories of Horatio Alger, Jr. An online discussion group devoted to Alger summarizes the conventional plot of his stories succinctly:

An adolescent boy with a rural back ground [sic] sets off to earn his livelihood in an urban setting. He triumphs over circumstances and temptations and starts advancing in his career. At some point, he will be betrayed or falsely accused by one of his peers. Ultimately, the hero will be vindicated. While pluck and hard work play a role in the success of an Alger hero, *there is always an older male who takes on the hero as his protégé*. That mentor plays a critical role in the success of the Alger hero. The Alger hero never takes revenge on those who mistreated him. He secures what is rightfully his, but he is never vindictive. Alger heroes never have romantic interests. As they leave adolescence, *these heroes leave his books except to play the role of mentors for the new generation* of Alger heroes. (Emphasis added.) (“Subject: Horatio-Alger FAQ”)

Such is the story that inspires the “American Dream,” but it is worth noting that Alger’s boys do not come to wealth through virtue and hard work but through strokes of luck which involve being chosen for mentoring by rich, powerful, childless older men. The stories inspire ambition and economic desire in boys—and also a willingness to be mentored. In the world outside of fiction, that relationship is not as innocent or benevolent as it seems in Alger’s stories, as Alger himself well knew. The “Horatio Alger Chapter” (in New York) of the controversial North American Man-Boy Love Association recognizes Alger as an important figure in the history of pederasty in the United States; Reverend Horatio Alger, Jr. left Brewster, Massachusetts amid accusations by the Unitarian Church he served as minister of his practicing “deeds that are too revolting to relate” on young boys of the congregation.3 Mentoring introduces boys to

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3 Richard Polenberg’s discussion of the Church’s investigation of the accusations, its finding that Alger was guilty of the offense and its statement that there was “good reason to think” Alger
corruption, if only of the economic kind, and opens them to exploitation by older men. The Horatio Alger story is a model for coming of age, coming to wealth, and coming into a specific set of experiences that Gatsby (with his late nineteenth-century childhood) likely knew and certainly, quite consciously, embraced.

**Roman Mentoring: Masters, Slaves, and Homosexuality**

His “volumes on banking and credit and investment securities,” Nick claims, contain “shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew” (pp. 7-8). In an earlier manuscript version of the novel, Nick comments that his books contain “shining secrets only Morgan and Midas and Rothschild” knew; the change in the final draft replaces the name of a modern banker and founder through his sons of an international banking dynasty with that of an ancient homosexual literary mentor. Maecenas devoted his time to his famous literary circle after retiring from political life as counselor to Augustus; a wealthy, generous patron of the arts, he was mentor to some of the most celebrated poets of the era, including Horace, Propertius, and Virgil, one of the most unambiguously homosexual figures of antiquity. The reference to Maecenas, along with allusions to the *Satyricon*, evoke a history of male “bonds” highlighting connections between modern mentoring such as those represented by Horatio Alger and ancient traditions involving explicit slavery and overt homosexuality, which are deliberately constructed as implicit and covert throughout the novel. Such referenced traditions include that of the “catamite,” the youthful lover of an older man. In *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity*, Classics scholar Craig A. Williams argues that for ancient Romans, the binary distinctions between free and slave, dominant and subordinate, masculine and effeminate, were more important distinctions than homosexual/heterosexual. It is precisely these distinctions related to power and wealth—free/slave, dominant/subordinate, masculine/effeminate—to which Fitzgerald points in his representation of mentoring relationships in *The Great Gatsby*, and Nick’s placement of Maecenas aside Morgan and Midas connects contemporary practices of economic exchange and the ancient practices of homosexuality.

Critics have noted, superficially, that Nick’s reference to Trimalchio seems apt enough: In the “Dinner with Trimalchio” section of the *Satyricon*, Trimalchio hosts

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4 The reference to the American financier J.P. Morgan here might be another reference to economics and queer sexuality, as Morgan’s daughter, philanthropist, salon host, and expatriate Anne Morgan, was lesbian, a fact which likely would have been known to Fitzgerald. While it is beyond the scope of this essay, it might be noted that lesbians figure prominently in both Fitzgerald’s life and work during this period.

5 For a thorough recent discussion of the influence of the *Satyricon* on *The Great Gatsby*, see Endres (2009).
wild, orgy-like parties that serve merely as a venue for his ostentatious display of wealth; like Trimalchio, Gatsby seems more interested in orchestrating his parties and displaying his wealth than in his guests. This is not a passing allusion, however. Fitzgerald offered “Trimalchio in West Egg” (Letters, p. 169) and later “Trimalchio” (p. 170) as possible titles for the novel; by January 1925, of having settled on the title The Great Gatsby, the author would write, “It’s O.K., but my heart tells me I should have named it Trimalchio. However against all the advice I suppose it would have been stupid and stubborn of me” (p. 177). Likely the advice Fitzgerald received against so identifying the novel was motivated by a sense that any association with the figure of Trimalchio, like the reference to Maecenas, would make overly explicit the thematic connections seen throughout the novel between contemporary patriarchal capitalism, homosexuality, and slavery.

Trimalchio is a freedman, and despite his current position of wealth and power, his ostentation demonstrates that he belongs not to the nobility but to the lowest class: he is a former slave. His behavior illustrates the kind of pederastic love French feminist Luce Irigaray argues underlies a patriarchal economy in which wealth and power are transmitted between men; Trimalchio’s monologue puts into words the process by which a commodity transforms to an agent of exchange. When his wife becomes angry at him for bestowing particular attention on a “remarkably pretty boy” slave, covering him with “rather prolonged kisses” (p. 80), Trimalchio says he shows him this attention “because he’s a good boy, a thrifty boy, a boy of real character. He can divide up to ten, he reads at sight, he’s saved his freedom price from his daily allowance and bought himself an armchair and two ladles out of his own pocket. Now doesn’t a boy like that deserve his master’s affection?” (p. 81). (Trimalchio’s slave is here like the 17-year-old beachcomber James Gatz, who earns millionaire Dan Cody’s attention by being “quick, and extravagantly ambitious” (p. 106); at the end of the novel, we learn from his childhood notebook that the young Jimmy mastered virtues of hard work and frugality.) Prompted by his wife’s questioning his affection for his particular boy, Trimalchio relates to his guests his own transformation from slave to master and from commodity to agent, suggesting that his sexual exploitation of the boy is, ultimately, in the boy’s economic interests. The innuendo of Trimalchio’s narrative reveals such sexual exploitation to be an inherent element of the economy:

But like I was saying friends, it’s through my business sense that I shot up. Why, when I came here from Asia, I stood no taller than that candlestick there. In fact,

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6 Enders notes that “a Maecenas, probably the famous Augustan patron of the arts, is featured on Trimalchio’s tombstone (Sat. 71.12).”

7 Fitzgerald’s friend T. R. Smith of the publisher Boni and Liveright had recently worked on a translation of the Satyricon, against which were leveled claims of obscenity.

8 The notebook of course parallels the author’s own, in which Fitzgerald recorded often cryptic observations on people and the life since childhood, and his Ledger, in which he maintained strict accounting of his finances throughout his life.
I used to measure myself by it every day; what’s more, I used to rub my mouth with lamp oil to make my beard sprout faster. Didn’t do a bit of good, though. For fourteen years I was my master’s pet. But what’s the shame in doing what you’re told to do? But all the same, if you know what I mean, I managed to do my mistress a favor or two. But mum’s the word. I’m none of your ordinary blowhards. [p. 76] Well, then heaven gave me a push and I became master in the house. I was my master’s brains. So he made me joint heir with the emperor to everything he had, and I came out of it with a senator’s fortune. (p. 82)

Trimalchio’s story highlights the ways in which, economically, accepting one’s exploitation is simply good “business sense.” Wealth and power are passed, as Irigaray has argued, between men in father-son relationships that are openly pederastic. While Trimalchio represents his own questionable physical affection toward his boy slave as a kind of reward for the boy’s virtue and ambition (like the relationship between those lucky, plucky poor boys and their mentors in Horatio Alger), he at the same acknowledges that his own master’s affections were undesirable. Ultimately, it would appear that it is because he recognizes that he cannot escape the unwanted attentions of the master that Trimalchio decides it is simply good “business sense” to use such exploitation to one’s own advantage.

Reading *The Great Gatsby* in the context of Alger and Petronius illuminates the rhetorical strategy that Fitzgerald employs in making his own argument about mentoring. Readers need to understand Nick’s role as narrator in order to appreciate Gatsby, whose appearance in the novel is not objectively reported but, as we shall see, colored by the narrator’s exigency, the central component of which is an ethical dilemma about his place in a world of men. Nick’s role as narrator and his shaping of Gatsby’s story then reveals similar themes in the life of Fitzgerald himself.

**Nick’s Narration: Reflecting on the Bonds Between Men**

Nick’s storytelling is motivated by a desire to reflect on the meaning of his experience with Gatsby, and perhaps to recuperate something of the character Nick lost through that experience. Early in the novel, Nick says that his observation of the events in New York ended, for a time, his interest in men: “Gatsby turned out all right at the end; it is what preyed on Gatsby […] that temporarily closed out my interest in the abortive sorrows and short-winded elations of men” (pp. 6-7). Following Keath Fraser in 1979, many critics have remarked on Nick’s homosexuality. He acknowledges that he came East from his Midwestern home to escape being “rumored into marriage” (p.

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For thorough examinations outlining the evidence of Nick’s homosexuality, see Keath Fraser and Edward Wasiolek. In his 1979 essay “Another Reading of *The Great Gatsby*,” Fraser expresses puzzlement that few critics remark on Nick’s ambivalent sexuality, citing both textual and extra-textual evidence to identify Nick’s sexual “ambiguity” and “ambivalence”; Wasiolek builds on Fraser’s reading in his 1992 essay, highlighting much more evidence to support an interpretation of Nick’s “homosexuality.”
49). Nick comes to New York City to learn the bond business, a line of work he feels is appropriate: “Everyone I knew was in the bond business so I supposed it could support one more single man” (p. 8). In this move he joins other young men in what George Chauncey, a historian of gay culture, refers to as a “bachelor subculture” (pp. 76-86). Having just turned thirty, Nick is extremely aware of his own aging, calling himself “five years too old” (p. 186); he bemoans the “thinning list of young men to know” as men in their mid-to-late twenties get married and there are fewer men his own age with whom he can associate (p. 143).

Nick’s concern about aging centers on his distaste for what he perceives to be the essence of all sexual relations: systems of power and domination. We see this distaste in Nick’s reaction to being placed in the dominant role in a homosexual experience. In chapter 2, Nick encounters photographer Chester McKee at a party at Myrtle’s apartment, and they leave the party together in a passage that clearly (if subtly) suggests a pickup. An ellipsis marks a period of time between Nick’s and McKee’s arriving in McKee’s apartment; when that time has passed, Nick stands over the nearly naked photographer, who is lying in bed showing him his portfolio—an extension of McKee’s request that Nick help him “get the entry” on Long Island—that is, to assist him in obtaining work (pp. 42, 37). In relation to McKee, Nick is in a dominant position, both physically and economically. Nick is not a powerful man, however, a fact of

10 The image and Nick’s reaction are ambiguous: If we understand the disjointed phrases following the image of McKee with his portfolio—“Beauty and the Beast ... Loneliness ... Old Grocery Horse ... Brook’n Bridge”—to be the titles or subjects of the photographs in the portfolio, then the photographs of the portfolio represent quite a different kind of photography than McKee’s public work as a portrait photographer. Is this, perhaps, the professional protrait photographer McKee’s “real” art—which echoes Nick’s own Whitmanesque reflections on Manhattan—which he chooses to share with Nick following an intimacy? The photography of Carl Van Vechten, another Midwesterner moved East and close friend of the Fitzgeralds’ in 1920s New York—embodies a similar dichotomy between public and private. A white supporter of the Harlem Renaissance, Van Vechten began taking portrait photographs in the 1930s; unknown to the public, however, until they were unsealed by Yale’s Beineke archives in 1989, have been a series of nude, interracial, homoerotic photographs taken in the 1930s and 40s. This series of photographs is the subject of James Smalls, _The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten: Public Face, Private Thoughts_.

11 Following Nick’s flirtation with McKee in the elevator, a new paragraph begins, “... I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands” (p. 42). In mentioning the scene in “Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing,” I mistakenly reverse the positions, stating that “Nick wakes up unclothed in McKee’s bed” (p. 89). Of course, the mysterious ellipses both before and after this sentence likely represent Nick’s drunken consciousness during events he does not describe (not limited to sleep), and as the present argument makes clear, his description of McKee—and not himself—in the reclining and vulnerable position is of critical significance. In the manuscript that has been published as _Trimachio: An Earlier Version of_ The Great Gatsby, the line reads, “... I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, still clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands” (p. 32). The deletion of the word “still” in the finished manuscript highlights the relationship between the passage of time and McKee’s state of undress.
which he reminds the reader repeatedly. Nick is drunk for only the second time in his life, he tells us, and he is repulsed at finding himself unexpectedly in a sexualized dominant position.12

Nick clearly understands the logic of patriarchal capitalism and the machinations of homosocial exchange, not merely because he works in stocks and bonds, but because he identifies the relationship between stocks and bonds, male bonding, and the bondage of slavery. He sees Gatsby’s life, his transformation from the poor boy James Gatz to the wealthy and powerful Jay Gatsby, as a clear expression of the connections between the American Dream of economic success and ancient practices of slavery and homosexuality. (It is he, after all, who refers to Gatsby’s “career as Trimalchio” [p. 65].) In his narration of Gatsby’s story, Nick seeks a model of masculinity that might show him a way to escape the predatory nature of the mentoring relationship. This narrative technique, filtering Gatsby’s story through Nick’s interpretative matrix, provides a dual perspective on the American Dream: while Nick views the story with a cold economist’s eye, Gatsby, at the end, retains his innocence and continues to believe.

**NICK’S GATSBY: THE TRANSFORMATION FROM COMMODITY TO AGENT OF EXCHANGE**

As told by Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby’s story illuminates the role economics plays in gender. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray observes that “[t]he economy—in both the narrow and the broad sense—... requires that women lend themselves to alienation in consumption, and to exchanges in which they do not participate, and that men be exempt from being used and circulated like commodities” (p. 172). Fitzgerald clearly agrees with the first part of this assertion, as the story of Daisy’s wedding, as told by Jordan Baker (whose queerness mirrors Nick’s own), clearly conveys.13 On the day before her wedding, Daisy is afraid and wants to back out. She sends Tom the string of pearls that signified her engagement to him, an object parallel to the dog collar Tom purchases for his mistress Myrtle, an instrument of domination and control suggestive of slavery’s chains.14 Daisy was forced to follow through with the marriage by women in the service of patriarchy, including Jordan:

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12 Transgressive characters—Jordan, Daisy, Nick—are meticulously self-possessed and do not drink, likely because their lowering of inhibitions might result in an indiscretion such as Nick’s leaving the small party in Myrtle’s apartment with McKee. Daisy’s drunken behavior the night before her wedding must have been particularly shocking, because, Jordan has told Nick, Daisy doesn’t drink (p. 82).

13 In “Jordan Baker, Gender Dissent, and Homosexual Passing in *The Great Gatsby*,” I argue that Nick’s and Jordan’s relationship is a heterosocial alliance rather than a heterosexual love affair—and that the character of Jordan Baker embodies a conflation of racial and sexual transgression that is key to understanding the novel.

14 Trimalchio himself draws the parallel between marriage and slavery, referring to his wife Fortunata’s jewelry as “the chains and fetters our women load themselves with” (p. 73).
I rushed out and found her mother’s maid and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. [...] She didn’t say another word. We gave her spirits of ammonia and put ice on her forehead and hooked her back into her dress and half an hour later, when we walked out of the room, the pearls were around her neck and the incident was over. Next day at five o’clock she married Tom Buchanan without so much as a shiver [...]. (p. 81)

The preceding section of the novel said a lot about Daisy’s young womanhood and courtships, but it mentioned nothing about how Tom Buchanan of Chicago entered the Louisville social scene. Given how much is made of Tom’s horses—his fine stables and polo playing—it is logical to suppose that he had business dealings in Daisy’s hometown, a city known for the Kentucky Derby and the raising of Thoroughbreds. Did Tom come down to Kentucky to buy horses and find himself a wife? Such a connection associates the homosocial exchange of women in marriage with horse trading and, through the necklace/collar, the older tradition of slave trading.

It is clear from Nick’s narration of the Gatsby story that Fitzgerald would not agree with the second part of Irigaray’s statement: as a Wall Street trader and gender dissident, Nick knows full well that men—especially boys and poor men—are commodities that can and do function as objects of trade15 between older, more powerful men. In The Great Gatsby, Nick deconstructs Gatsby’s identity as the rich, powerful, enigmatic figure, tracing his identity formation backward through Gatsby’s involvement in business, education, military service, adolescence, and childhood. Nick focuses particular attention on transformative moments in Gatsby’s life, which always occur in relationship with men and most often through the influence of a mentor. In the analysis below, I reverse the direction of Nick’s narrative in order to trace Gatsby’s deliberate, self-aware conversion from boy to man and from commodity to agent of exchange.

The earliest image of Jay Gatsby comes through the notebook, written by his son “Jimmy,” that Mr. Gatz shares with Nick after Gatsby’s funeral. The document records the youthful Gatz as earnest, hardworking, ambitious, and determined to succeed—in short, everything we would expect to see in the hero of a Horatio Alger novel. When next we see him, Gatz is an attractive seventeen year old who, in Nick’s words, “knew women early” but feels “contemptuous [...] of young virgins because they were ignorant, of the others because they were hysterical about things that in his overwhelming self-absorption he took for granted” (pp. 104-105). Gatz would have been seventeen around 1910, in the era of the women’s suffrage movement, so we might surmise that the things older, sexually experienced women are “hysterical” about have something to do with the treatment of women by men and with the role of women in a patriarchal economy. Not one to join in women’s “hysterical” rage, the poor and powerless Gatz turns his attention to the source of wealth, power, and privilege in American society: older, wealthier, and more powerful men.

15 Whether or not Fitzgerald was aware of the gay slang usage of the term “trade,” which Chauncey indicates was in active use at the time of the novel’s writing (see below), the persistent use of economic language to describe sexual transactions in the novel is notable.
At seventeen, James Gatz meets Dan Cody, his first and most important mentor. Here is Nick’s highly coded description of their first encounter:

[Cody] had been coasting along all too hospitable shores for five years when he turned up as James Gatz’s destiny in Little Girl Bay. To young Gatz resting on his oars and looking up at the railed deck, that yacht represented all the beauty and glamour in the world. I suppose he smiled at Cody—he had probably discovered that people liked him when he smiled. At any rate, Cody asked him a few questions (one of them elicited the brand new name) and found that he was quick, and extravagantly ambitious. A few days later he took him to Duluth and bought him a blue coat, six pair of white duck trousers and a yachting cap. And when the Tuolomee left for the West Indies and the Barbary Coast Gatsby left too. (p. 106)

A frontiersman who made a fortune exploiting the land for personal gain, Cody is “a product of the Nevada silver fields, of the Yukon, of every rush for metal since Seventy-five. The transactions in Montana copper that made him many times a millionaire found him physically robust but on the verge of softmindedness” (p. 105). Cody’s ambition for wealth and his capacity for exploitation are associated with sexuality: he is “the pioneer debauchee who during one phase of American life brought back to the eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon” (p. 106). This observation suggests a connection between Cody’s exploitation of the land and his sexual exploitation of other human beings.

Gatsby seems to recognize in Cody’s economic power a mentor figure out of the pages of Horatio Alger, and he is attracted to Cody’s wealth and power. (Given the description of Cody as “a grey florid” and “elderly” man, it is unlikely that physical attraction is a motive [p. 106].) Gatsby willingly and self-consciously offers himself to the older man and, in so doing, consciously and overtly changes his identity: “It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a row-boat, pulled out to the Tuolomee and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour” (p. 104). Gatz is an opportunist here, prostituting himself to achieve the success he desires. Presenting himself for service “in a vague personal capacity” to the older Cody, Gatsby embodies the term “trade”; Chauncey clarifies that acting as trade did not reflect something fixed about one’s sexual preference in the gay subculture of this period: the term “sometimes referred specifically to ‘straight’ male prostitutes, but it also continued to be used to refer to ‘straight’ men who had sex with queers and fairies for pleasure rather than for money” (p. 70).

For Nick, Gatsby’s relationship with his mentor is something ugly; he calls the photographs in Gatsby’s bedroom (one of Cody, another of Gatsby in sailor costume aboard

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16 As biographer Sara Mayfield relates, Dan Cody was the name of a Montgomery suitor, son of the president of Union Bank and Trust, who competed with Fitzgerald for Zelda Sayre’s attention in Montgomery, Alabama (p. 46).
Cody’s yacht) “a token of forgotten violence” (p. 165). Irigaray says of mentoring that “[father-son] relations, which are in effect everywhere, cannot be eradicated through the abolition of the family or of monogamous reproduction, nor can they openly display the pederastic love in which they are grounded” (p. 193). Gatsby remembers his relationship not as one of pederastic exploitation but rather as a friendship. Of Cody, he says simply, “He’s dead now. He used to be my friend long ago” (p. 99). In fact, Fitzgerald characterizes their relationship as much more than friendship—as a kind of marriage that parallels Daisy’s relationship with Tom: Daisy Fay becomes Daisy Buchanan wearing the necklace Tom gave her, and she travels through the South Seas, ending up in Santa Barbara; James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby wearing the sailor outfits Cody gave him, and he travels around the continent, ending up in San Francisco.

The relationship ends only with the death of Cody, under mysterious circumstances related to the sudden appearance on the scene of the journalist Ella Kaye, who is secretly Cody’s wife. Cody’s death only days after her appearance suggests some kind of malfeasance, and it would make sense if it were a kind of disciplinary violence. It is one thing, that is, for Cody to engage in casual sexual exploits while cruising in his yacht, but quite another for him to become particularly close to one young man. If Ella Kaye killed Cody because she was afraid of losing her position, she might have been correct: Cody had already written Gatsby into his will. The “legacy of twenty-five thousand dollars” that Cody intended for Gatsby was lost, however, when Kaye sued over the bequest; the courts upheld the heterosexual veneer of patriarchal capitalism, overriding Cody’s wish, and “what remained of the millions went intact to Ella Kaye” (p. 107).

Intriguingly, one of the ways in which Francis Ford Coppola’s screenplay for the 1974 screen adaptation develops the romance plot between Daisy and Gatsby is to place in Gatsby’s room several photographs of Daisy. In fact, in the novel, Nick mentions only two photographs in Gatsby’s bedroom: one of Cody and one of Gatsby aboard Cody’s yacht. Coppola was hired to write the screenplay after the film studio rejected Truman Capote’s screenplay for it, which he had been commissioned to write.

Their marriage is never openly stated in the novel, but Cody’s relationship with Kaye is based on that of the investigative journalist Nellie Bly (Elizabeth Jane Cochran) and millionaire industrialist Robert Seaman, who married when Bly was 32 and Seaman 72; it was the only marriage for both. The reference to Ella Kaye as “Madame de Maintenon,” the secret wife of King Louis XIV of France (married in a morganatic marriage—a marriage, in the context of European royalty, which prevents the passage of any titles and privileges to the wife or any children from the marriage) illuminates Kaye’s blackmailing of Cody and the basis on which she later contests his will. Marriage to the investigative journalist protects the old tycoon from the widely circulating rumors about his sexuality and leaves her his exclusive legal heir (p. 107). Mirroring the ambivalent relations between mentors and their protégés throughout the novel is this pattern of heterosocial alliance (as opposed to heterosexual romance) between men and women as is seen in the marriage of photographer Chester McKee and his wife, Nick’s relationship with Jordan, and even, perhaps, Gatsby’s proposed relationship with Daisy.

Certainly the implication is that Kaye murders Cody because she realizes how close he has become to his young companion of five years: She marries Cody in 1902 and “send[s] him to sea
After his dalliance with Cody fails to produce the intended result, Gatsby turns to more conventional means for Americans to gain entry into the economic system: male societies and social institutions. After the death of Cody, Gatsby fights in the Great War, an experience that helps him to bond with his fellow veteran, Nick, but his military service also paves the way for his entry into Oxford University. While some of Gatsby’s acquaintances doubt his claim to have studied there, there is some evidence that supports it. Nick’s description of the “high Gothic library [in Gatsby’s house in West Egg], paneled with carved English Oak, probably transported complete from some ruin overseas” (p. 49), closely resembles the description of the library at Princeton’s “Cottage Club” (itself modeled on an Oxford University library), the elite club of which Fitzgerald was a member. According to official club history,

The library on the second floor is modeled on the fourteenth century library in Merton College, Oxford University. Many rooms are paneled in English oak, with carved ceilings and cornices. Great marble fireplaces grace several areas with mantels. In the Dining Room, one such carving reads, “Ubi Amici Ibidem Sunt Opes which has become over the years a motto of the Club. (“Club History”)

The Latin motto, “Where there are friends there are riches,” succinctly states the novel’s themes—that wealth is accumulated through connections to prosperous men. While we don’t learn what, if any, advantage Gatsby gained through his schooling, we do know that attendance at another elite school, Yale, and membership in an elite senior society there, brings together Nick and Tom (who seem, otherwise, to have little or nothing in common).

At some time after leaving Oxford, Gatsby develops ties to another masculine fraternity, organized crime. Gatsby’s second mentor is Meyer Wolfsheim, “the man who fixed the World Series back in 1919” (p. 78), a character loosely based on famed gangster Arnold Rothstein. Bonds between men are as integral to the function of organized crime as they are to leaders of society, business, and government—and just as the members of elite fraternities recognize that “where there are friends there are riches,” members of organized crime refer to their organization as a family and to themselves as “good fellas” or “friends of ours.” In the parallel between Wolfsheim and Cody, and in the similarity between their relationships with Gatsby, Fitzgerald illuminates the ways in which the underworld functions according to the same logic of patriarchal capitalism as does the respectable world: wealth, power, and privilege similarly operate through systems of father-son relationships, connections, and sexual exploitation.

We learn very little about the specific role that Wolfsheim plays as Gatsby’s mentor, but the unmistakable implication is that he ushers Gatsby into the business of organ-

in a yacht”; five years later, he takes Gatz/Gatsby aboard and they live and travel together for another five years; the arrangement, Nick says, “might have lasted indefinitely except for the fact that Ella Kaye came on board one night in Boston and a week later Dan Cody inhumanely died” (p. 81).
ized crime. There is a physical resemblance to Dan Cody in that Wolfsheim’s appearance is similarly repulsive: he wears cufflinks made of human molars (p. 77), which recall the rape of natural resources performed by Cody and which connect Cody’s frontier colonialism with twentieth-century urban, industrial business practices through the commodification of human beings.

The business world in which Wolfsheim mentors Gatsby is not only shady (if not criminal)—it is also quite possibly gay. The “well-fanned Forty-second Street cellar” in which Nick meets Wolfsheim, a man Gatsby calls a “denizen of Broadway,” probably references to a gay underworld. According to Chauncey, by the 1910s Broadway had become known as one of the city’s major cruising areas, and Wolfsheim’s nostalgia for “the old Metropole” located “across the street” (p. 73) situates their location in Times Square, “one of the city’s most significant centers of male prostitution in the 1920s” (Chauncey, p. 66). It is interesting to note that Rothstein, whom Fitzgerald met, was no such thug; in fact, with his quiet and well-mannered demeanor, his pale, smooth complexion and meticulous manicure, Rothstein was something of a dandy. Perhaps Fitzgerald revised Rothstein’s appearance and demeanor as yet another instance in the novel of transgression veiled in machismo. Rothstein himself had a background in business and he specialized in making connections between people of various backgrounds, providing loans and advice to protégés such as Meyer Lansky, Lucky Luciano, Legs Diamond, and Lepke Buchalter—a mentoring role that earned him the title “father of organized crime.”

Despite these coded references to a homosexual identity, Wolfsheim does not endorse the overtly homosexual pederasty that we see Cody engage in when he picks up Gatsby in Little Girl Bay. At fifty years old, Wolfsheim is precisely the same age Cody was when he met Gatsby, but where Cody invites Gatsby onto his yacht to serve “in a vague personal capacity” (p. 104), Wolfsheim expresses interest only in a heterosocial relationship with his protégé. Wolfsheim tells Nick that on meeting Gatsby, “I knew I had discovered a man of fine breeding after I talked with him for an hour. I said to myself: ‘There’s the kind of man you’d like to take home and introduce to your mother and sister’” (p. 77). In this statement, Wolfsheim explicitly articulates the logic of patriarchal capitalism in which women must play the role of commodity in a heterosexual relationship between men, and he reifies the Roman system of patronage (associated with Maecenas) that demonstrated how homosocial exchange is veiled in heterosexuality. Wolfsheim knows what Cody seems not to have known, that the proper way to solidify a relationship with a man is to bring him into your family through marriage to a sister or, if you have one, a daughter. Under patriarchal capitalism these heterosexual alliances work as well for gay men as for straight men, and Wolfsheim expressly supports a butch veneer when he encourages the “young men” (Gatsby and Nick) to “discuss your sports and your young ladies” (p. 77).

Society did not tolerate long-term, committed, monogamous homosexual relationships in this era, as evidenced when Nick’s plan to share a house in suburban West Egg with a co-worker is thwarted by the company’s unexplained, last-minute ordering of the young man to Washington (p. 8). In “Commodities Among Themselves,” Irigaray clar-
ifies: “The ‘other’ homosexual relations [other than father-son], masculine ones, are just as subversive, so they too are forbidden. Because they openly interpret the law according to which society operates, they threaten in fact to shift the horizon of that law” (p. 193). In other words, pederastic relationships in which money is exchanged are intolerable in patriarchal capitalism, as they reveal the homosocial exchange that, for Irigaray, underlies heterosexual romance. This is the lesson—that homosocial exchange must be concealed beneath the veneer of heterosexuality—Gatsby learns from his disinheritance and from Wolfsheim.

At the end of his life, Gatsby has become a mentor himself, allowing Klipspringer to live in his house, serving in a vague capacity as, perhaps, an entertainer. Gatsby also offers to serve as a mentor to Nick, offering him money and business connections through Wolfsheim. It seems as though Gatsby is looking for a way out of the predator / prey binary that underlies the mentor relationship under patriarchal capitalism in seeking a heterosocial alliance with Daisy, who wants out of her marriage with Tom, a relationship in which she is expressly identified as a commodity. We never see a romantic exchange between Daisy and Gatsby; the closest we come to an intimate scene is when Gatsby shows Daisy his shirts, commodities that represent his wealth, power, and privilege. This scene is difficult to comprehend, and readers often interpret Daisy’s tears as ones of delight at Gatsby’s wealth, a reading consistent with a view of her as insipid. I would offer a more nuanced understanding of the response. Daisy understands her own powerlessness (stuck in a marriage she was forced into to an adulterous, physically abusive husband), and perhaps she recognizes the codes here as well. In Gatsby’s bedroom with Gatsby and Nick, Daisy notices the pictures of Cody and of Gatsby on the yacht (pp. 98-99). Seeing the colorful, silk shirts which, like the pink suit he wears elsewhere in the novel, mark him as socially, if not sexually, queer, Daisy becomes hysterical because she recognizes that he is equally a victim of patriarchal capitalism; in other words she cries for him because she sees what he has done to himself in order to attain his position.

The failure of a heterosocial alliance between Daisy and Gatsby is inherent in its conception: Gatsby has never sought to escape from patriarchal capitalism, but merely to accommodate its demands; when he overtly challenges patriarchal authority (as embodied in Tom), he winds up dead through an act of disciplinary violence. As often happens, the instrument of disciplinary violence is not the authority figure himself, but rather an agent who resides at a lower social rank: Myrtle’s husband George, who believes that Gatsby (and not Tom) is Myrtle’s lover and, incidentally perhaps, her killer.

This disciplinary violence that follows defiance of patriarchal authority is “what preyed on Gatsby” and what motivated Nick’s disconnection from the world of men during his retreat to his family’s Midwestern home following the events of the novel. In “The Great Gatsby: Romance or Holocaust?” Thomas J. Cousineau argues that “the putative grandeur of Gatsby’s dream does not adequately account for the novel’s power or its lasting significance” (p. 110). In other words, the putative romance between Gatsby and Daisy is not the novel’s focus; in fact, that romance seems to exist largely in Nick’s imagination. Rather, Cousineau persuasively argues for the centrality of the
theme of ritual sacrifice, demonstrating that “the genuinely moral dimension of [the novel]—and hence its enduring greatness and universality—rests with the opportunity it affords us to experience, yet also to resist, the scapegoating impulses—in a way that is, at once, both flagrant and surreptitious—its emotional backbone” (p. 137). It is when the dead Myrtle’s husband George Wilson turns his gun on himself after murdering Gatsby that, Nick says, “the holocaust was complete” (p. 170). All, that is, who have threatened patriarchal capitalism (as represented by Daisy and Tom’s marriage) are now dead. The lesson Nick learns from this ritual sacrifice is that he must follow the model of Jordan Baker, whose “careful” (studied, composed, and sober) behavior allows her to live a life of economic and sexual independence. In any case it seems likely that his life will continue to be shaped by his anxieties about living under patriarchy.

### FITZGERALD’S MENTORS AND SACRIFICES TO PATRIARCHY

Fitzgerald remarked to Scribner’s editor Max Perkins, that *The Great Gatsby* is “a man’s book,” in which female characters like Daisy and Jordan seem, the author acknowledged, to “fade out” (*Letters*, p. 173; emphasis in original), a representation of the novel that supports my view of Nick’s narrative as Nick’s attempt to reconcile his anxiety about patriarchal violence with his commitment to a male-oriented life. Coisineau’s argument that the book is about ritual sacrifice, a sacrifice that I argue is intended to accommodate the demands of patriarchal capitalism, helps to illuminate similar issues in Fitzgerald’s life. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald’s life was shaped by older men who mentored him into the literary life; like Nick, he struggled to understand his identity and to reconcile that personal identity with his very public ambitions. Over the course of his lifetime, Fitzgerald would make similar accommodations and accept the need for similar sacrifices in order to live in society.

The standard biography of Fitzgerald represents his life in a pattern similar to that of Gatsby in his figure as a Horatio Alger hero. Alone at the age of 15, the (metaphorically) fatherless boy comes East, where he is chosen by mentors who help him rise; the young man’s hard work and success (drafting, revising, publication of a first novel) are rewarded by marriage to a beautiful girl. The rest of the familiar biography is taken up with the bittersweet romance of Scott and Zelda.

By contrast, Fitzgerald himself seems to have understood his relationship with his mentors to be fraught with anxiety. After a lonely, miserable first year at the Newman School, 16-year-old Fitzgerald is befriended by a 37-year-old trustee of the boarding school, a worldly, sophisticated priest recently converted to Catholicism. Sigourney Fay’s published letters to Fitzgerald are pederastic in tone: “I always think it such a shame that your very American training makes it impossible for me to pour out my paternal affection to you like I do to Peevie, for whom I notice you have the truly elder brotherly low opinion” (*Fitzgerald Correspondence*, p. 29). The “Peevie” referenced in the letter is Stephan Parrott, another Newman School favorite of Fay’s, a younger boy with whom Fitzgerald (at age twenty-two and in college) perhaps competed for the priest’s attention.

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Both of Fay’s protégés—Parrott then at Harvard and Fitzgerald out of the army and living in New York—grieved his unexpected death intensely. Parrott elaborately described his recurrent suicidal fantasies in a letter to Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald Correspondence, pp. 41-42), and Fitzgerald wrote to another mentor that “Father Fay always thought that if one of us died the other would, and now how I’ve hoped so” (Fitzgerald Letters, p. 375). In the same letter, Fitzgerald claims Fay’s death has confirmed his decision to become a priest himself, yet later he will identify the year prior to Fay’s death as his “Last year as a Catholic” (Fitzgerald Ledger 172). While the exact nature of Fay’s mentoring remains unknown, its effect on Fitzgerald and Parrott was powerful and not altogether salutary.20 Certainly, Fitzgerald’s ambivalence toward the Catholic Church is deeply connected to his experiences with Fay and the Irish nationalist writer Sir Shane Leslie, another important mentor figure in Fitzgerald’s early career.

A friend of Fay’s, Leslie was a reader for Scribner’s; he recommended the young man’s manuscript The Romantic Egoist, which he would revise extensively into This Side of Paradise, to Charles Scribner; he also promised to help Fitzgerald revise it, if the press would accept it. Leslie teases Fitzgerald in a 1920 letter, saying he hoped to replace Fay in Fitzgerald’s life after the priest’s death: “The [Monsignor] left you to me in his spiritual testament and I am responsible for seeing that your talent harms nobody including yourself” (Fitzgerald Correspondence, pp. 66-67). This representation of himself as a commodity to be traded between the two older men came at a time when Fitzgerald was striking out on his own, both as a writer and as a man—Leslie’s reason for writing that letter was to chide Fitzgerald for marrying without his blessing—and it is easy to imagine Fitzgerald’s resentment of the tone and content of the letter, given that he cools off relations with Leslie shortly afterward. In another (earlier) letter, Parrott extends the suggestion of pederasty in the mentoring relationship by confirming Fitzgerald’s sense that Leslie’s interest in them is corrupt: “I felt exactly about Leslie as you do but unlike you the next time I go to New York for any length of time I will religiously call on him” (p. 42). Later in the same letter, Parrott seems to interpret Fitzgerald’s upcoming marriage to Zelda as an attempt to relieve the anxiety produced by these mentoring relationships, writing, “I wish I could meet a Zelda just now” (p. 42). It is easy to imagine that such relief would come by acceding to the demands of patriarchal capitalism.

In this interpretation of their marriage, the romance of Scott and Zelda masks the same kind of sacrifice that we see described in The Great Gatsby, specifically in Nick’s loss of Gatsby. Over the course of his life, Fitzgerald repeatedly sacrificed relationships with men—men with whom he had an intense, even loving, relationship—in order

20 Fay’s correspondence has long been “believed to have been burned by Fay’s mother after his death” (Fitzgerald, Correspondence, p. 21), although correspondence in the Sir Shane Leslie Papers at Georgetown University Library between Fay’s assistant, William A. Hemmick and Leslie casts doubt on that assertion. No Newman School records exist; this owes in part to the fact that the school was Catholic in spirit, and had the patronage of one of Fay’s own mentors, Cardinal Gibbons, but was operated by laypeople outside of the diocese structure.
to pursue success and maintain a proper relationship to patriarchy. Those relationships include those with his father, Charles Donahue (“Sap”), Parrott, Bunny Wilson, Gerald Murphy, and Ernest Hemingway. It was of his relationship with Hemingway that Fitzgerald wrote in his *Notebooks*, “I really loved him, but of course it wore out like a love affair. The fairies have spoiled all that.”21 In this statement, Fitzgerald reveals what must have been the ultimate sacrifice, of himself or an essential part of himself: The youthful, idealistic young man who desired a world of male camaraderie, a life that was essentially homosocial. “The fairies have spoiled all that” because, in the parlance of the day, “fairies” are gay men who flamboyantly display their homosexuality. Fitzgerald preferred a more “careful” relationship with men, on the Hemingway or Gerald Murphy model, an essential part of which involved getting married to a woman.22

Critics regularly draw on the author’s biography in their discussions of Fitzgerald’s novels, but *The Great Gatsby* has not received the same attention except to suggest that Gatsby’s relationship with Daisy is vaguely similar to Scott’s with Zelda. Instead, we should read the novel as articulating the author’s deeply held anxieties about gender and social status. Gatsby represents the youthful idealist in Fitzgerald, someone who could maintain faith in the American Dream in spite of everything that called such faith into question; Nick, on the other hand, is the cold, calculating pragmatist who is capable of sacrificing anything, including himself, in order to achieve that dream.

REFERENCES


21 *Notebooks*, #62.

22 Fitzgerald was upset about Robert McAlmon’s claims about homosexuality and marriages of convenience in his circle reiterated to Fitzgerald by editor Maxwell Perkins, among them that he and Hemingway were both homosexual, as was Hemingway’s wife Pauline (Bruccoli, pp. 132). An expatriate married to the lesbian Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman), McAlmon was himself familiar with homosexual experience and heterosocial marriage in the 1920s; his *Distinguished Air: Grim Fairy Tales* (published the same year as *The Great Gatsby*), describes the gay subculture of Berlin.
Froehlich


