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Advertisement as American Myth: The Great Gatsby and the Arrow Collar Man

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1 J.C Leyendecker, Arrow Collar Ad, 1924

To an exceptional degree, cultural allusions pervade *The Great Gatsby*. Some of these are contemporary—those to pop songs, for example. They establish temporal setting and resonate thematically (Moreland). There are also references to visual art reminiscent of the cultural past and to the contemporary present. The most important of these are evocations of the Arrow Collar Man, who exemplifies the advertisement as the great American art form. It is a corrupt artform in that its goal is not aesthetic but financial. It expresses sub-religious myth, a paradigm of meaning informing the collective imagination of Jay Gatsby and the other characters in the novel. Basically the advertising message is that if you acquire the right product—house, automobile, or (most intimately) clothing—you get the right (most desired) girl. Uniquely in the novel, to Jay Gatsby this is tantamount to theology, though that of an ersatz religion, since to him the girl, Daisy Buchanan, is the fulfilment of ultimate desire.

In 1925, the year of the publication of *The Great Gatsby,* the Arrow-Collar style of man was universally familiar, owing to a decades-long powerful, high quality advertising campaign. In the text of Fitzgerald's novel, multiple evocations give the dapper young Arrow Collar Man cumulative thematic importance. He is part of the cultural ground against which the narrative figures, an ubiquitous presence involved in a literary-pictural equivalent to intertextuality—imaginative 'intervisuality' might be an accurate expression. In a pervasive *sym-bolein* (Greek for 'throwing together', the meaning of 'symbol'), this advertisement plays an important part in juxtaposing the lives of the smart set in and around New York in the roaring twenties with the conventions of contemporary advertisements. Moreover, since this intervisuality involves clothing as defining personal image, it suggests targeted social engagement, disguise, pretense or performance, and evokes the false yet powerful cliché, 'clothes make the man'.

In chapter 7 of the novel, Daisy and Tom Buchanan are with Nick Carraway, Jordan Baker, and Jay Gatsby in the Buchanan home in West Egg. Daisy is bored and wants to go into Manhattan. In a manner indicative to all present, including her husband, that she is in love with Gatsby, she says to Gatsby, '"You always look so cool…. You resemble the advertisement of the man,' she went on innocently. 'You know the advertisement of the man—'" (94-5). Before she can recover from momentary aphasia, Buchanan interrupts, irritably announcing his willingness to drive into Manhattan for what becomes, in the hotel suite, the confrontation scene and dramatic climax of the novel. Daisy's repeated expression 'the advertisement of thee man' is peculiar since advertisements are usually 'of' items to buy or places to visit or performances to attend or films to see but not 'of a man' or 'of *the* man' (my italics), the definite article implying that 'you', Gatsby, are familiar with this man-in-the-ad. In her comment to Gatsby, she is trying to specify a particular man or kind of man in a series of advertisements, one so widely familiar that she expects him—and Fitgerald expects anyone, including the contemporary reader—to know him or his type. This can only be, the Arrow Collar Man (124 n8).[1] The allusion importantly conditions our reading of the novel.

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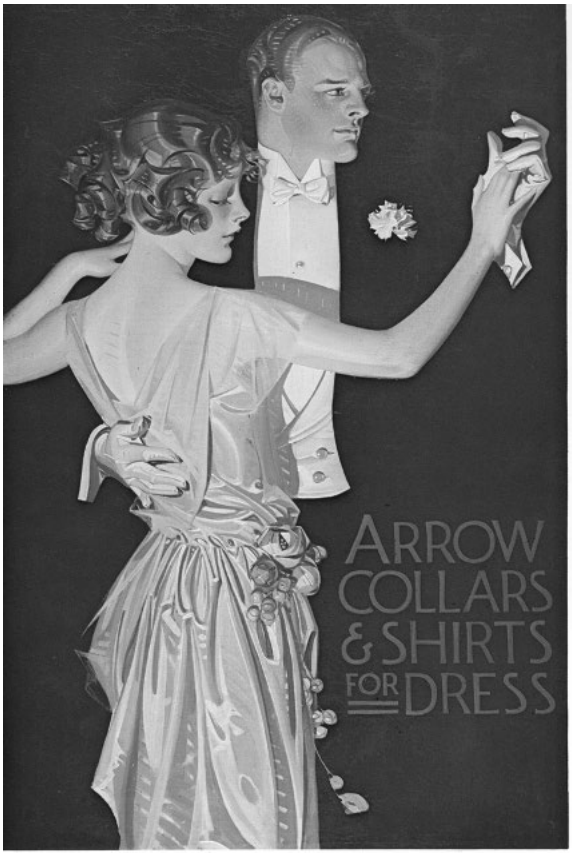
[1] Kirk Curnutt tentatively suggested that 'the advertising icon Daisy has in mind is likely the Arrow Collar Man' (124 n8). I think this more than likely. Leyendecker scholars have noticed the affinity of the Arrow Collar Man to Fitzgerald's novel. Schau writes that 'the characters of ... *The Great Gatsby* come to mind in many Leyendecker



J.C. Leyendecker, Arrow Collar Ad, 1913

My first hint at what Daisy's advertisement might be occurred in a conversation I had in 1982 with an acquaintance of Fitzgerald, the American music critic and composer Virgil Thomson. He had met Fitzgerald in Paris in 1925, the year *The Great Gatsby* was published. Thomson was recalling for me the writers and visual artists he had known then. They included Gertrude Stein, Picasso, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, and Hart Crane. I asked about T.S. Eliot, and he replied that Eliot rarely visited Paris, adding, 'He looked like a young man from the advertisements for a good New York haberdasher. He was a typical young-man type. He wasn't quite as young as … Scott Fitzgerald, but they both looked like Arrow Collar ads' (297). It was evident to me that this was a 1920s simile, one which Thomson, Fitzgerald, and their contemporaries would naturally and spontaneously have used to characterize any well-heeled, well-groomed, nattily-dressed, handsome young man.

The Arrow Collar Man was created by the fashion illustrator J.C. Leyendecker for Cluett, Peabody & Co. of Troy, New York, which operated the largest collar, cuff, and shirt factory in the world. Sales distribution was worldwide. The Arrow Collar Man is an idealized figure, for whom the words of George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (which underlie the American cliché quoted earlier) are literally true: '*Le style, c'est l'homme*.' The Arrow Collar Man is extremely clean, handsome, well-knit, well-off, well-groomed (with a fresh haircut)—the male equivalent of the (much more natural) Gibson girl of an earlier generation, though not associated with an advertisement campaign. His expression is almost always calm, introspective, or blasé—the 1920s equivalent of 'cool'. From 1905 through 1930—the duration of the Arrow Collar

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pictures of the twenties: well-to-do, civilized people with self confidence reinforced by b reeding, education, position, and taste' (43), an opinion endorsed by Cutler and Goffman (47).

advertisement campaign—drawings or paintings of the Arrow Collar Man were reproduced in most issues of many major newspapers and magazines, on car cards, on billboards, and on advertising posters throughout North America, Britain, and continental Europe. His costume varies from informal (sporty, coatless) to formal (elegant evening attire), but the male figure remains basically the same, with classic features, varying mainly in hair- and eye-colour and heaviness of build. He is often shown in the company of a pretty woman. The publicizing of the Arrow Collar Man became and remains one of the most successful advertising campaigns ever. It was so effective that Arrow's annual sales of collars and shirts worldwide rose by 1918 to thirty-two million and by the mid-1920s to 208 million, which was 96% of market share (Cutler and Goffman 74). After the Great War, when detachable collars became unpopular, the company increased its production of shirts with attached collars, and the Arrow Collar Man, while retaining his title, became the Arrow shirt man.

3 J.C. Leyendecker, Arrow Collar Ad, 1919.

Essentially a pinup boy, this icon of flawless, fashionable American masculinity was so popular that he received fan mail, mostly from women—by 1920 over a thousand letters a week. In one month in the early 1020s he received 17,000 fan letters, gifts, and marriage proposals, a

deluge of mail surpassing that received by cinema idol Rudolph Valentino at the height of his fame (Schau 30). The Arrow Collar Man was the ideal of many contemporary readers of Fitzgerald's novel—and, of course, of many of those who did not read but looked at images in magazines or newspapers, saw posters on trains, or collected car cards. In a sense, the novel incorporates this masculine ideal just as advertisements of the time did. As Marshall McLuhan used to say, the role of the advertisement is to put on the public.[2] In the same way, the novel mirrors the conventionally-shaped desire of contemporary readers—in this case, the paragon they wish to emulate or mate with.

The Arrow Collar advertisement campaign was so successful by the end of the Great War that Leyendecker was engaged to illustrate ads for comparable campaigns by other makers of men's clothing, notably B. Kuppenheimer; Hart, Schaffner & Marx; and Interwoven Socks. He was also as early as 1909, illustrating automobile advertisements for Pierce Arrow and, by 1914, for the Overland Automobile Co. and Franklin Automobile. Among the many other national clients he illustrated for—there were at least thirty-two—were Chesterfield Cigarettes, Cooper Underwear, Ivory Soap, Palmolive Soap, Procter and Gamble, and Right Posture Clothes. The most important magazine cover artist prior to Norman Rockwell, Leyendecker was also a prolific supplier of covers for many national magazines, including *Collier's, Ladies' Home Journal, The Popular Magazine, Success Magazine,* and *Vanity Fair.* He created 322 covers for the *Saturday Evening Post* between 1899 and 1943, chiefly for holiday issues (Shau 25-7; Cutler and Goffman 100). All the young men in his non-shirt ads and magazine covers are essentially the same as the Arrow Collar Man, who was therefore far more visually prevalent even than Arrow Collar advertisements.

Resemblance between the Arrow Colar Man and Gatsby is implied by Nick Carraway's descriptions of Gatsby: 'His tanned skin was drawn attractively tight on his face and his short hair looked as though it were trimmed every day' (41)—the hair of the Arrow Collar Man always looks freshly cut. Like him Gatsby is associated with sporty athleticism and automobiles. Carraway tells us that Gatsby said, 'Good morning, old sport' to him while 'balancing himself on the dashboard of his new car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly

[2] I often heard McLuhan say this. For several years between 1968 and 1975 I was one of his students. Later I had many conversations with him over meals.

American—that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games' (51). These words would serve perfectly to describe the Arrow Collar Man. Moreover, Gatsby is implicitly associated with a prevalent context of the pictorial ad campaign when Carroway says that listening to him 'was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines' (53).

The probability that Daisy, speaking to Gatsby, intends to indicate his resemblance to the Arrow Collar Man is strengthened by overt allusions elsewhere in Fitgerald's works. He alludes to the Arrow Collar Man five years earlier in *This Side of Paradise* (1920), where Amory Blaine is said to possess 'intent green eyes' and a mouth that to Myra St Claire's 'thirteen-year-old, Arrow-collar taste was the quintessence of romance' (18).[3] The Arrow Collar Man's appeal in Fitzgerald's writing is not limited to early adolescence. In his 1929 story 'The Last of the Belles', Ailie Calhoun, who resembles Daisy in having to navigate between attractive military men during the Great War, tells the narrator about 'her bother who had died in his senior year at Yale', and shows him 'his picture—it was a handsome, earnest face with a Leyendecker forelock—and told me that when she met someone who measured up to him she'd marry. I found this family idealism discouraging' (*Short Stories* 431).

Daisy seems to see in Gatsby a resemblance to the same iconic figure, and even though she fails to complete the identification, the contemporary reader of *The Great Gatsby* would be expected to catch the allusion. In fact, it is likely that Fitzgerald is able to leave Daisy's identification incomplete precisely because the contemporary reader would finish it for her. And the irony of Tom Buchanan cutting her off before she can identify the type is that, as we shall see, Buchanan also resembles the Arrow Collar Man, though the more muscular version. Daisy is evidently attracted to the Arrow Collar type.

Clinching the argument that Daisy is referring to the type of the Arrow Collar Man is her peculiar verbal expression. Nearly all advertisements—and this was certainly true in the 1920s—are not, in her words, 'of the man' but of the clothes he wears, the car he drives, the Victrola he plays, the radio he listens to, etc. The only contemporary exceptions—certainly the only ones involving a male—were the Arrow Collar ads, which promoted not merely a brand of product but its personification in a kind of man popularly known by a title beginning with the definite

[3] My thanks to James L.W. West III for pointing out this allusion.

article. The Arrow Collar Man initiated the concept of branding and was the first real advertising campaign ever launched (Cutler and Goffman 71, 74). There would be no comparable phenomenon in advertising until Philip Morris's Marlborough Man in the 1960s and '70s, and there has been none since.[4] When Daisy says, 'You resemble the advertisement of the man …. You know the advertisement of the man—' we can be certain that she is referring to the Arrow Collar Man.

In having Daisy associate Gatsby with the best known of contemporary advertisements, which are also, significantly, shirt advertisements, Fitzgerald and probably Daisy, is hearkening back to the pre-coital culmination of Daisy's reunion with Gatsby as he gives her and Carraway the tour of his mansion. In his bedroom, Gatsby

> Took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one, before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel, which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many colored disarray. While we admired he brought mora and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily.
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> 'They're such beautiful shirts' she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. 'It makes me sad because I've never seen such—such beautiful shirts before.' (73-4)

His action and her reaction involve an equal balance of opulent materialism and erotic infatuation, a combination irreducibly astonishing in its effect. The materialist aspect is owing largely to shirts being a measure of wealth. The quality of cloth in a shirt determines cost—the more dense the thread-count the more expensive. Such a large number of top-quality shirts is an impressive indicator of wealth. The erotic aspect of the balance is owing to tactile luxuriance and a shirt's being as intimate as clothing gets without being underwear—and clothing is, after all, an extension of the skin. Daisy's burying her face in Gatsby's shirts is a symbolically intimate act.

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[4] Products have been associated with other recognizable figures, such as Mr Clean, the Jolly Green Giant, and the Maytag Repair Man, but males do not aspire to resemble them and no more than a few, if any, women want to mate with them.

4 J. C. Leyendecker, Pierce Arrow Ad, 191o

This scene and Daisy's comment later about Gatsby resembling 'the advertisement of the man' emphasize that Gatsby's vision is modelled on the conventional erotic ploy of Madison Avenue, something Fitzgerald knew all about. Having worked four months in 1919 writing copy for the advertising agency Barton Collier, he understood perfectly the rhetoric informing the symbolism of the dad: the right purchase gets you the right girl—the girl of your dreams as a bonus, an accessory. By one, get the other free.

The evocation of advertisements in the novel goes beyond the Arrow Collar Man to the automobile; they are often interrelated, as when the Arrow Collar Man is placed in or near an automobile. Obviously and compellingly, the strategy informing the Arrow Collar ads was also used in automobile advertisements, many illustrated by Leyendecker, which were prevalent throughout North America and Europe in the mid 1920s. Cars figure prominently in the novel, most notably Buchanan's blue coupe and Gatsby's yellow Rolls Royce. Furthermore, the surname of the narrator, Carraway, contains the words 'car' and 'away', possibly to suggest the incongruous yet compelling combination of mechanized commodity and romantic distance. 'Carraway' also contains a homonym for 'arrow' and in this sense resonates with the Arrow Collar brand as well as with the brand name of the Pierce Arrow automobile. It may also suggestively incorporate Cupid's arrow, as certainly the shirt and automobile brands subliminally did. Carraway does, after all, facilitate the reunion between Gatsby and Daisy and the resumption of their love affair. Depicted solo or with another of his type, the Arrow Collar Man is always alluringly unattached and erotically available, often to a visually depicted, admiring female or females, all the more so when he sits in or leans on a shiny new automobile.

While availability to females is convincingly implied by the Arrow Collar Ad, the illustrator, Joe Leyendecker, was homosexual. He often used his long-time lover of nearly fifty years, Charles Beach, as a model for the heavier, muscular, strong-jawed blond in the ads (Shau 30). Some critics have seen homoeroticism in *Gatsby,* especially owing to Carraway's going off with the drunken photographer, Chester McKee, who when Carraway leaves him, is in bed in his underwear (32). Leyendecker was secretive about his sexuality, so Fitzgerald may not have known about it. But he might well have surmised it when, a year before *Gatsby* was completed, Fitzgerald met Leyendecker with Beach—a meeting that Cutler and Goffman claim took place at a speakeasy (47) but without giving a specific date or source.[5] Fitzgerald revised the novel in Italy from November till its publication on 10 April 1925. Since, in the novel, it is chiefly Gatsby and Buchanan who resemble the Arrow Collar Man, and their heterosexuality is not in doubt, Leyendecker's sexuality may seem slight or marginal as a possible influence on the novel, but it is arguably profound, partly explaining Carraway's fascination with Gatsby and suggesting that the pristine grooming of the Arrow Collar Man as narcissistic is, in that respect, inherently queer. But the myth underlying the ad is heterosexual.

The association between Daisy (as the desired female) and automobiles is implied by a coincidence near the end of the novel, when Gatsby is somehow simultaneously awaiting a call for her and keeping the line 'open for long distance from Detroit' (123)—perhaps he has two telephone lines. Detroit was then the automotive capital of the world.[6] Waiting for both calls, he remains symbolically suspended in the hiatus of the advertisement, between financial acquisition and sexual romance. As Carraway says, Daisy is evocative 'of romances … redolent of the year's shining motor-cars' (118), which are symbols of wealth, power, freedom, and

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[5] The possibility of such a meeting is limited to spring and early summer of 1924. The speakeasy in question, the El Fey Club, opened on 1 May 1924 (Beliner 97, 106); and Fitzgerald quit drinking in August.

[6] His being ready for a phone call from Detroit symbolically evokes 'this year's shining motor-cars' (118). The anticipated phone call may have to do with the failed attempt to sell stolen bonds in Detroit, a city too big and therefore too sophisticated in which to succeed in such an attempt. That is why Gatsby had said over the phone, 'I said a *small* town…. He must know what a small town is…. Well, he's no use to us if Detroit is his idea of a small town' (75). But the phone call may also have to do with bootlegging. Owing to its proximity to Windsor, Ontario, where Hiram Walker produced whisky during Prohibition, the Windsor-Detroit corridor was a conduit for smuggled liquor. It was as close as reality came to what Carraway refers to as the legendary 'underground pipe-line to Canada' (78).

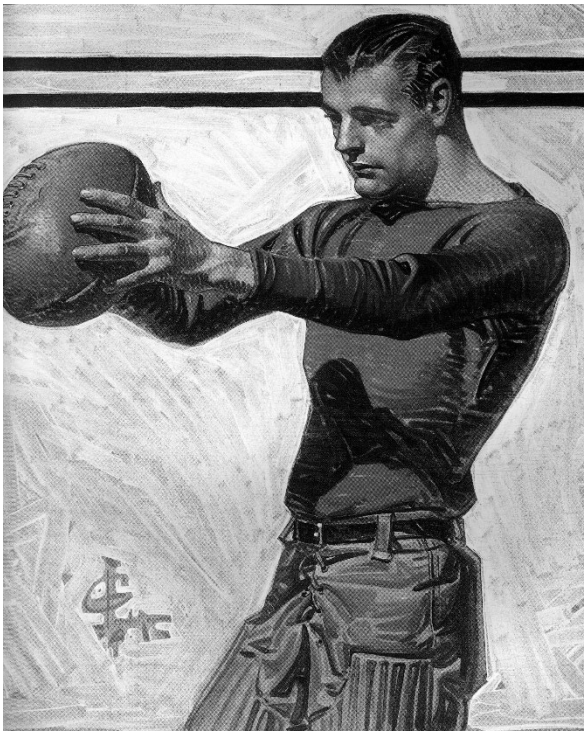
excitement—these being the commercial and romantic values that advertisements rely upon for their effectiveness.

What is true of Gatsby's imagination is also true of the erotic dynamics of the novel. Both are based on commercial advertisements, in particular on the Arrow Collar ads, to which Daisy gropingly refers and which were then visible throughout the civilized world. The assumption behind the ad is that the handsome young man, sometimes in or beside a new car, will get the beautiful girl. His appeal as a potential mate is largely that he can afford good clothes and a car. Of course, the advertiser and the firm employing it really want only one thing, money. And Daisy symbolically encompasses even that, since her voice is, Gatsby and Carraway famously agree, 'full of money' (96). That makes her symbolically appropriate as object of the desire of a man who resembles an advertisement largely because, with or without consciously intending to, he imitates it.

Daisy's identification of Gatsby with 'the advertisement of the' Arrow Collar Man has a significant effect on the form of the novel in emphasizing an association between Gatsby and his rival and nemesis, Tom Buchanan. Buchanan's current mistress, Myrtle Wilson, says that when she first encountered him on a train, 'every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head' (31), suggesting that for Myrtle, at some level of valuation, the man and the ad are interchangeable. Myrtle is undoubtedly unaware of this. She merely disguises her interest in Buchanan by gazing at something nearby, something intended moreover to draw gazes. The equivalence and interchangeability of man and ad is, however, implicit for Fitzgerald, as it ought also to be for the reader—the aesthetic of this remarkable novel is as tight as that of a good poem. Doubtless intended as significant by Fitzgerald, this second, parallel association of a man with an advertisement might involve any advertisement. But Fitzgerald suggests the likelihood of its being an Arrow Collar ad by having Myrtle say in the next line that when they came to the station Buhchanan's 'white shirt-front pressed against my arm' (31). Once again, the association is stressed by peculiarity of expression. The reference to the 'shirt-front' is colloquially odd. The normal thing to say would be, 'He pressed up against my arm' or 'He pressed his front (or stomach or chest) against my arm'. Here Fitzgerald is going out of his way, circumventing ordinary usage, to introduce the word 'shirt'. This and the verbal proximity of 'advertisement' to 'shirt-front' in Myrtle's narrative aligns Buchanan, too, with the Arrow Collar

Man. It also aligns Myrtle with Daisy, despite their difference in economic class. And it suggests that in basic type, her husband and Gatsby fall within her parameters of erotic desire.

Strengthening the suggestion that Myrtle on the train has been looking at an Arrow Collar ad is Buchanan's having been a star football player at Yale, 'one of the most powerful ends that ever played football at New Haven—a national figure in a way' (8). Cole Porter celebrated just such a figure in his song, 'If I were Only a Football Man', written in 1913 and sung that year by the Yale Glee Club. (In a fictional past, Buchanan might have heard it sung if, as we may assume, he graduated form Yale a year or two before his marriage.) The persona in Porter's song wants to become 'a football king' and says that, if he does, 'For my autograph I'd charge a dollar, / And I'd be the title of an Arrow Collar.' For Porter and his generation, the apogee of success would be nominal identification with the Arrow Collar Man. Furthermore, in many of Leyendecker's covers for *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, football players are, in all but costume, identical to the Arrow Collar Man (see illustration 5)—so the association between football and the Arrow Collar advertisement was already part of American visual culture. As a former 'football king', Buchanan corresponds to the athletic Arrow Collar type of the physically perfect American male, one who is also financially well off. Based largely on that commercialized image, Gatsby tries to be like Buchanan and the men of his set. Imaginatively, romantically, Gatsby is more appealing than Buchanan but he is false. Buchanan is the real thing. Significantly, he got the girl, gets her again, and he keeps her.



5. J.C. Leyendecker, *Saturday Evening Post,* 24 Nov. 1912

There are two other dimensions to Gatsby and Buchanan being foils in relationship to the advertised idea. One of these dimensions is psychological; the other is ethical. Both are also aspects of the American Dream. The national theme is stressed by the central day of events being 'the Fourth of July' (23) and by the famous, lyrical conclusion of the novel about Manhattan as

'the fresh, green breast of the new world' (143) which now includes 'the dark fields of the republic' (144).

As promulgated and used by advertising, the fulfillment of the American Dream is wealth and privilege, characteristics of the economic class of which Buchanan is a member and to which anyone may aspire. Democracy sanctions that aspiration—'class' in North America is not an exclusive term. And North American advertising presupposes and declares that since wealth buys privilege, class may be bought. But is that all there is to class? What about confidence or a sense of entitlement, which is so important to personal style? This is where Buchanan has the advantage over Gatsby. Buchanan's wealth and privilege are inherited—he has enjoyed them all his life. Gatsby, whose background is lower class, feels obliged to pretend that the same has been true for him. He repeatedly interjects into his conversation 'old sport,' a trope of the British upper class, and he claims to have been 'educated at Oxford' and to have 'lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe' (52)—an expression that gives the lie to itself, since you can only live like a rajah in India.[7] Underlying his lying, which is awkward and makes him seem ridiculous, is insecurity. What Buchanan has by virtue of class, and what eludes Gatsby and perhaps any other aspirant to Buchanan's class, is confidence or a sense of entitlement. That give dramatic advantage in the contest for Daisy. Crossing class boundaries is apparently not as easy as advertising promises.

In addition to this falsehood, there is something essentially wrong with the American Dream as advertised. Gatsby and Buchanan have wealth in common but are, as foils, morally reverse images. Gatsby is publicly immoral, acting outside the law, while Buchanan is legally innocent but privately immoral. The criminality of Gatsby and the private immorality of Buchanan do not achieve fictional parity. Gatsby seems less guilty because there are no personal victims to his criminal activities—at least none mentioned in the text—whereas Buchanan's behaviour has multiple victims. Daisy endures his adultery. And Myrtle and her husband and Gatsby die as a consequence of it. Yet Buchanan successfully embodies the American Dream. The dream itself is therefore flawed by the omission of personal moral responsibility. Advertising and the commerce it serves are complicit in that omission. Fitzgerald's primary

[7] In respect to lying, Gatsby has a foil in Jordan Baker. She, too, is rumoured to have been dishonest and may have 'moved her ball from a bad lie' (47)—a bad lie in a punning sense being one of the things that undermines Gatsby's cultural credibility.

critique of the American Dream as sustained by modern advertising seems to be that, however enticing, the valuations of wealth, beauty, and erotic bliss, without the fundamental values of truth and goodness, are vacuous.

In the novel, West Egg, East Egg, and Manhattan are symbolically identified with 'the valley of ashes' (21), which is 'the waste land' (222). It is presided over by the 'blue and gigantic' 'eyes of Doctor T.J. Ecklebburg' (21), which Myrtle's husband, an inhabitant of the place, identifies as 'god' who 'sees everything'. He is immediately corrected by a neighbour, 'That's an advertisement' (127), but there is no contradiction. The god of this place is the advertisement, which indicated for many Americans, as it continues to do, the heaven of desire.

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