**SDU**

## *Master Thesis*

## Front page for examination assignment

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| **Teacher:** Henrik Lassen | | |

| **Title of assignment:** |
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| Fatal Ambitions: The Overreacher in *Frankenstein* and *The Great Gatsby* |

| **Min./Max. number of characters:** | **Number of characters in assignment[1]:** |
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## INTRODUCTION

Two literary classics will be addressed in this thesis: *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) and *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley (1797-1851). One is *the* American novel and the other is one of the most enduring Gothic novels ever published. Nearly one hundred years separate these two novels; however, they both share the status of being influential and significant pieces of literature. The works will be analyzed, interpreted, and compared. *The Great Gatsby* is examined in relation to *Frankenstein* to exemplify how novels that differ in time and geography, and thus on the surface seem not to be comparable, may share important elements nevertheless. In other words, I am going to scrutinize in what ways we can relate *The Great Gatsby* to *Frankenstein*. Hence, the thesis statement for this project is as follows: Can Jay Gatsby be considered a Gothic protagonist? The motivation for the thesis is a book by William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy* (1985), in which Jay Gatsby is considered in relation to the Gothic due to the assumption that certain parallels between Gothicism and Modernism can be found. These parallels will be considered during the thesis. In other words, this project seeks to move beyond literary isms in the study of Gatsby as a Gothic figure. To begin with, the method will be considered, involving a brief note on hermeneutics and a deliberation regarding possible challenges in this thesis. Selected historical and literary background will be given to present the two novels in relation to their broader context. Thus, the Romantic period in Britain will be explained in which the Gothic as a literary style developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and a comment on Mary Shelley and her inspiration for *Frankenstein* will be given. Subsequently, overall traits of Modernism will be described; a literary style and movement in which Fitzgerald's literary activities arguably unfolded, in particular in relation to the interwar Jazz age in the United States. However, it will be considered with attention to the fact that Fitzgerald's position within the movement is debatable. In the analyses, selected Gothic characteristics will be employed. Followed by an analysis of *Frankenstein* in which Gothic features are paid particular attention to, *The Great Gatsby* will be analyzed according to the same procedure in order to examine the thesis statement. The Gothic areas of focus in the analyses are the following: 1) Limitless ambition and grotesque illusion, 2) Isolation and alienation, 3) Identity struggles, and 4) Overreaching and downfall: hubris and nemesis. A following discussion will be given in order to deliberate on differences and similarities, and thus to what extent Gatsby can be considered a Gothic protagonist. The thesis suggests the possibility of this particular reading with the examination of the abovementioned focus areas that dominate both novels. Among critics, the

interpretation of Gatsby as a Gothic figure is limited; if he is read as Gothic then he is certainly read as something else as well, with the latter being the more mainstream approach. However, a Gothic reading of Gatsby is worth the attention.


## METHOD

As a field, the humanities is engaged in the study of human beings as active and creative; hence, focus is on cultural products and the human psyche. That includes the field of literature, which is the scope of this thesis. The humanist approach considers culture and history as fundamental in respect of human identity. Hence, subjects such as norms, ethics, individuality, and the human mind are fields of interest. Enhancing the understanding of human beings, human interaction, and human attempts to express their assessment of themselves, their existence, and the world in which we live through art, music, and literature is what research is based on. The hermeneutical method is used in the investigation of man across time in written texts and in oral communication. The study involves analysis and interpretation, which makes it possible to evaluate and explain literary products, as regards this thesis. This procedure is related to the so-called hermeneutic circle, which involves the notion that one must first understand the component parts in order to understand the whole and vice versa. In other words, all interpretation and understanding is connected or context related. In addition, it also indicates the continuous process of studying human products such as literature; the circle never ends.

The overall method or procedure of this thesis is literary analysis and interpretation of *Frankenstein* and *The Great Gatsby* and not least the comparison between the two. The analysis of *Frankenstein* will function as a frame, thus enabling the study of Gatsby as a Gothic protagonist. Since two literary works that hail from different periods in time are the subjects of this thesis, a comparative analysis will be given to investigate differences and similarities in these literary products. The comparative analysis begins in the analysis of *The Great Gatsby* since it is analyzed in relation to *Frankenstein*, and it is further elaborated on in the discussion. The apparent differences between the novels in terms of time and geography must be noted. In other words, this thesis compares an iconic Gothic novel from 1818 with an American classic from 1925, which involves a Gothic reading of the latter. That is, selected Gothic elements and features will be examined in a work that is not normally associated with the Gothic, which can prove a challenge. Few critics have approached *The Great Gatsby* with a Gothic reading in mind, making it a rather

unmapped area. However, according to Day parallels between Gothicism and Modernism can be found: "The peculiar qualities of Gothic atmosphere anticipate a number of aspects of modernism, with its emphasis of [*sic*] the subjectivity of reality and the collapse of objectivity and the self" (28). In other words, "the Gothic fantasy introduced a number of themes, ideas, and images that the modernists took over; it helped prepare the way for modernism and provided some of the tools with which the modernists worked" (Day 166-167). Still, any parallels must be considered in the light of the differences in the *expression* of these similar themes: "the two [traditions] use very similar materials and techniques in radically different ways" (Day 169). In addition, according to Peter J. Kitson "We must be wary in our acceptance and use of such critical constructions as 'Romanticism' and 'Modernism' to define the culture of any given literary historical period" (Kitson, 1, emphasis added). The question then follows; does Fitzgerald fit into the Modernist mould in which he is generally placed? This question cannot be ignored in this study; it will be considered in the section on Modernism. Since Gothic traits in *The Great Gatsby* is a somewhat unexplored area among critics, the aim of this study is to examine the effects of a reading of Gatsby as an overreaching figure. The hypothesis is to learn more about Gatsby by looking at Gothic elements in the novel and additionally learn more about the Gothic by having a closer look at how it subtly lives on in a 'modern' novel such as *The Great Gatsby*. The two novels will be considered in the light of the literary periods in which they are generally placed beneath, keeping in mind the critical aspects of such an approach. "In discussing the relationship between the Gothic fantasy and modernism we are dealing with the ways in which the motifs, dynamics, and themes of a popular genre are transformed and used by a much broader and complex cultural movement" (Day 166). The link between Fitzgerald and Modernism is in particular an area of discussion. It will however serve as a contextualization.

## THE RISE OF THE GOTHIC IN THE ROMANTIC PERIOD

This section seeks to provide an overview of the Romantic period; a literary period in which Gothicism as a literary style arose.

The Romantic Period in British literature flourished in the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century. The period is described in relation to Romanticism, which was a style and an intellectual, artistic, musical, and literary movement that shared certain characteristics. However, the British writers of the period did not consider themselves a group of "Romantic"

authors belonging to a unified movement (Lynch and Stillinger 10, Kitson 2) and 'movement' is arguably not an accurate term to apply. By their contemporaries, the writers were treated as individuals or were grouped into various schools such as the 'Lake School'[2] and the 'Satanic School'[3] (Lynch and Stillinger 10). The different literary schools suggest literary differences; the Romantic poets were "divided among themselves on political and religious, as well as artistic, lines" (Kitson 2), even within the schools (Kitson 3-4). However, in general terms Romanticism involved strong feelings, imagination, individualism, interior consciousness, and a return to nature in contrast to reason and order. In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment stressed the search for truth, objectivity, and the primacy of facts (C. Brown 7). The emphasis on science and reason spurred a response among the Romantic period poets: "the Enlightenment provoked a reaction amongst those who saw it as too rational, too scientific and thus lacking in soul and feeling" (C. Brown 70-71). Thus, Romanticism can broadly be considered an attitude of the time involving the necessity of literary reform. In other words, the Romantic period was influenced by an atmosphere of change, which was reflected in cultural products.

## An atmosphere of change

In the late eighteenth century, new ideals and principles such as liberty and the rights of man began to flourish, which supported events such as the American and French revolutions. While the horrors of the French revolution made the British Government uneasy, progressive ideologies were embraced by Romantic period writers, who considered it "a great age of new beginnings and high possibilities" (Abrams 240). The poetry of the Lake School has been described as a poetical experiment synonymous with political change; an equivalent of the French Revolution even[4] (Lynch and Stillinger 16). The revolutions naturally led to a focus on human capabilities: "The Romantic period, the epoch of free enterprise, imperial expansion, and boundless revolutionary hope, was also an epoch of individualism in which philosophers and poets alike put an extraordinarily high estimate on human potentialities" (Lynch and Stillinger 19). The stress on human potential is largely addressed in *Frankenstein* with emphasis on its downside: the limits of man.

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[2] The Lake School consisted of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Robert Southey that considered themselves dissenters from established poetic conventions (Lynch and Stillinger 10).
[3] The Satanic School consisted of Leigh Hunt, Percy Shelley, and Byron who can be considered impious (Lynch and Stillinger 10.
[4] That reading, however, was prior to the forthcoming horrors of the revolution.

Reading material and readers transformed in the period. The literacy among the working classes due to teaching provided in Sunday Schools increased (Lynch and Stillinger 21). Thus, the authors of the Romantic period faced an unprecedented reading audience. Industrial effectivity and mass production included printing presses driven by steam engines, mechanized manufacturing of paper, the rise of publishing companies, and cheaper and more plentiful reading material (Lynch and Stillinger 21). However, this 'revolution' also faced a conservative reaction. Among some of the writers, the attitude towards the reading public and commercialism was negative; Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) described it as a "misgrowth" (Lynch and Stillinger 21). On the other hand, some writers such as George Gordon, later Lord Byron (1788-1824), became celebrities (Lynch and Stillinger 21). The novel was a highly popular and available genre among the public, which included Gothic novels such as *Frankenstein*. "By the 1790s novels trading on horror, mystery, and faraway settings flooded the bookmarket" (Lynch and Stillinger 584). Even though the Romantic period made room for the introduction of various genres, the novel was not considered 'high art' to begin with. Despite the novel's popularity among the public, many contemporary critics and Romantic period poets did not applaud the genre. The novel seemed to require fewer skills with its loose structure and lack of classic pedigree (Lynch and Stillinger 25), and it was criticized for being plot-driven (Lynch and Stillinger 585). William Wordsworth (1770-1850) considered novels "frenetic" (Lynch and Stillinger 585) and thought them to be "deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" (Wordsworth 297). To that, Coleridge intimated that novels were consumed rather than read (Lynch and Stillinger 585). Thus, in some circles the novel was a sign of the modern decline (Lynch and Stillinger 585) and often negatively described as mass produced commodities (Lynch and Stillinger 25). Another concern was the context of the French revolution; the growing literacy among lower classes, the stress on "the rights of man", and the popularity, influence, and so-called manipulative effect of the Gothic novels on its readers proved a hotchpotch of anxiety (Lynch and Stillinger 585), whether or not the fear was superfluous. Thus, the terror in the novels moved beyond the text and gave rise to horrors on various levels. The Gothic then seems to capture an overall 'romantic terror'.

"The romantic movement [as some prefer to call it] was to colour the British reaction to the Enlightenment and the rise of industry; it was preoccupied with a sense of the unknowable, the sublime, and conduct divorced from discipline and constant method. This romantic reaction to science was to become a permanent feature of British culture" (C. Brown 71). In *Frankenstein* particularly, the ambivalence of scientific developments is addressed with Frankenstein's creation

of the monster, which is described in relation to the discovery of scientific means by electrical experiments and of course Frankenstein's lack of ethical speculations. Hence, Shelley tells a tale that warns about limitless scientific developments by exemplifying a possible scenario involving modernity gone wrong in poetic prose. The actual scientific approach is not described in the creation, however its implications certainly are. A common trait among the Romantic poets was dissatisfaction with society (Goetsch 34) and the wish to "uncover the unreason in reason" (Goetsch 32), which *Frankenstein* seems to capture. Overall, societal and political changes affected the literature of the day.

## Characteristics of literature in the Romantic period

The Romantic writers sought "to make poetry new by reviving what was old" (Lynch and Stillinger 11) with a reintroduction of medieval romance[5], thus refusing to take the role of heirs to the eighteenth century poets (Lynch and Stillinger 11). One of the reasons for the renewed interest in the old romances is found in the commercial pressure of the time (Lynch and Stillinger 11). In other words, the mechanization and mass production, which was both effective and spurred progress but additionally introduced urbanization and preserved inequality among the people, made the writers long for the past; the days before industrialization. Wordsworth "bemoaned the tyranny of the factory bell in once-tranquil villages" (C. Brown 295). Hence, a re-evaluation of traits in the medieval romance took place in the Romantic period, which included the themes of wild adventure, chivalry, and love and made room for idealism and visionary imagination in the writers yet again (Lynch and Stillinger 4). *Frankenstein* can be considered a tale of an idealist whose medieval quest fails due to a delusional vision.

An alteration in the period was the focus on the human mind. The emphasis on nature or natural phenomena, which was depicted with a sensuous accuracy, was an entry to human thinking; it is an incorrect assumption that the Romantic poets were simply nature poets (Abrams 239). In addition, the admiration for nature was arguably also a reaction against urbanization (Lynch and Stillinger 13). This explains the poets' depiction of nature as uninhabitable and untamed rather than cultivated, which served as a free space from social laws (Lynch and Stillinger 20) since wild nature contrasted society and perhaps additionally the human mind. The sublimity of wild untamed nature in *Frankenstein* may represent Frankenstein's untamed aspirations. The notion of

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[5] Hence the name of the period.

the sublime was widely used in the Romantic period to describe nature as both beautiful and terrifying, which might suggest a duality that resembles the human mind. Hence, the focus on nature, which was arguably a gateway rather than an area of interest in its own right, must be perceived as secondary compared to the attention to human consciousness. Wordsworth considered the source of a poem to derive from the psychology of the individual poet, not the outer nature (Lynch and Stillinger 13). Focus was on central human experiences and problems; the "Mind of Man" even[6] (Abrams 239). "It is the Romantics' awareness of their self-consciousness and their wish to find a way of transcending this overpowering sense of self which marks out their work as modern" (Kitson 8) or innovative. In other words, a greater amount of reflection on existential questions took place in the period including the question of what it means to be human. This is a subject Shelley seemed to reflect upon in *Frankenstein* with her description of a monstrous human being and a humane monster, as well as in the psychological complexity suggesting a double nature that results in a grotesque unity; a phenomenon also referred to as *doppelgänger* or simply double, which will be further described later.

Wordsworth's announcement of good poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (295, Abrams 239), has been used to describe Romanticism and the state of the Romantic poet. Thus, the poet's function is highly praised and his essential role confirmed. The importance of the unforced impulsiveness of the poet's own feelings is part of the dissociation from the artful manipulation and focus on literary rules and conventions in neoclassical literature (Abrams 239). As a literary tradition, Romanticism was a reaction against "the neoclassical canons of good taste" (Lynch and Stillinger 11). The Romantic period writers favored innovation rather than traditionalism in both literary material, form, and style (Abrams 238), thus emphasizing their distance to the neoclassical writers. The conceptions of literary genre was considered another limitation, and as a consequence diverse literary styles expanded in the period: "The results was that, creating new genres from old, they produced an astonishing variety of hybrid forms constructed on fresh principles of organization and style" (Lynch and Stillinger 19)). *Frankenstein* exemplifies this phenomenon: Shelley experimented with form and style with the novel's "complex interweaving of letters, reported oral confessions, and interpolated tales" (Lynch and Stillinger 19). Day argues, "the development of the gothic fantasy as a genre with its own narrative rules includes the development of highly unreliable narrators and of competing narrators within the same text"

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[6] According to Day, the growing focus on inner life in the nineteenth century much likely led to the establishment of Freudian Psychology in the following century (165).

(Day 45). Thus, the Gothic contributed to an unconventional sense of chaotic and arbitrary formlessness with multiple voices and stories mirroring each other (Day 49), which corresponded with the period's detachment from literary constraint. According to Wordsworth, "there is no object standing between the poet and the image of things" (Wordsworth 301). Furthermore, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) believed the ideal process of making poetry was driven by an unconscious creativity (Lynch and Stillinger 16). Only then was poetry genuine according to the Romantics. According to Paul Goetsch, the Romantics praised man's creativity to the extent that the genius poet replaced God as the creative power (30); Shelley exemplifies and problematizes this attitude in *Frankenstein*. In relation to that, some Romantic writers argued that the complex mind of the poet as genius could result in melancholy and madness (Lynch and Stillinger 14). In other words, there may be a double nature in the poet, since he can be mad in his sensibility. The overestimation of man's creative powers, which results in destruction is a central theme in *Frankenstein*. Considering his traits in relation to the Romantic poet, Frankenstein can be considered a scientific genius as well as a mad scientist.

The process of writing in which the feelings and spontaneity of the poetic genius would unfold was accompanied by a feeling of loneliness. For instance, being alone is quite dominant in Wordworth's poetry with the use of words such as 'solitary', 'by one self', 'alone' (Lynch and Stillinger 20). "Many writers' choice to portray poetry as a product of solitude and poets as loners might be understood as a means of reinforcing the individuality of their vision" (Lynch and Stillinger 20). In his preface to *Lyrical Ballads,* for example, Wordsworth cuts himself off from the conventional way of making literature in a manifesto-like document, which stresses the need for literary reform as well as his artistic self-sufficiency as a self-made man (Lynch and Stillinger 19). However, the loneliness of the Romantic poets, who in reality were accountable to a crowd (Lynch and Stillinger 20), may also be linked to the feeling of isolation in certain protagonists. This is certainly the case in *Frankenstein*. The monster's appearance secludes him from human interaction, whereas Frankenstein isolates himself in his creative frame of mind and suffers utter loneliness as a consequence of his creative powers. Hence, the dissociation from the established conventions, which is exemplified in Wordsworth's preface, also involved a tribute to the inadequacy of the Romantic characters. This praise of the flawed was evident in the literary style as well: "the unfinished 'fragment' poems of the period ('Kubla Khan' most famously) [were not looked upon] as failures but … [as] a fragmentary trace of an original conception that was too grand ever to be fully realized" (Lynch and Stillinger 19). In other words, a dissatisfaction with

rules and restrictions was substituted for the glory of the imperfect (Abrams 240). The Romantic poets' spontaneity, isolation, visionary ambition, possible madness, and attention to the flawed are clearly reflected in *Frankenstein*.

        The stress on the poet may explain the poets' tendencies to invite the reader to link the protagonist with the poet himself; so-called self-revelation (Abrams 240, Lynch and Stillinger 14). Whether romantic protagonists referred to the poets themselves or not, "they were no longer represented as part of an organized society but, typically, as solitary figures engaged in a long, and sometimes infinitely elusive, quest; often they were also social nonconformists or outcasts" (Abrams 240). This description fits Frankenstein and his creature. Overall, there was a sympathy towards the disgraced and delinquent (Lynch and Stillinger 16). Despite the ill doings of both Frankenstein and his monster, Shelley makes the reader sympathize with both characters in their degradation. As has been mentioned, prior to its grim course the Romantic period writers considered the French revolution promising, since it spurred a feeling of optimism regarding the rights of man (Lynch and Stillinger 5-6). That optimism was arguably linked to the capabilities and limitless ambitions of the human being in their work: "Humanity's undaunted aspirations beyond its assigned limits, which to the neoclassic moralist had been its tragic error of generic 'pride,' now became humanity's glory and a mode of triumph, even in failure, over the pettiness of circumstances" (Abrams 240). Frankenstein's striving ambitions is a source to his downfall in Shelley's novel. In other words, there was a focus on overreachers: "These figures attempt to transcend human limitations and attain special knowledge and power" (Goetsch 35). The period's focus on human potentials, which expanded the scope for individual initiative, had an effect on the poetry: "much poetry of the period redefined heroism and made a ceaseless striving for *the unattainable* its crucial element" (Lynch and Stillinger 19, emphasis added). This longing for what cannot be achieved was widely considered in relation to the glory of human nature (Lynch and Stillinger 19), not the limits of man. Many Romantic period poets, inspired in part by Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "glorified Satan as a proud outcast of the Enlightenment, a rebel against God and other authorities, a victim figure like Prometheus, who has experienced injustice, or as a character mirroring the writer's own sense of isolation and defeat" (Goetsch 35). However, in contrast, Coleridge, Shelley and Byron's depictions of desolate landscapes were "often the haunts of disillusioned visionaries and accursed outlaws, figures whose thwarted ambitions and torments connect them, to … Satan" (Lynch and Stillinger 20). In other words, the opinion on human potentials was ambivalent. Shelley clearly represents the darker approach to unachievable goals in

*Frankenstein*, emphasizing the bounds of man. In addition, both Frankenstein and the monster can be considered partly Satanic (Cantor 105). In the Gothic, the quest hero was replaced by "an ambiguous, egocentric, self-destructive antihero" (Day 16). Thus, the Gothic protagonist becomes a "victim of his own desires and actions" (Day 18) to the extent that "no action can ever achieve its intended results" (Day 44).

Some Romantic poets, such as Coleridge and Keats, investigated "the realm of the supernatural" (Abrams 239). The "Romantic discourse on imagination and superstition emerged from the Enlightenment context of skepticism" (Goetsch 26). Even though *Frankenstein* cannot be considered a ghost story, the monster does have supernatural powers and Frankenstein's grotesque creation is a mystical and uncanny scenario nevertheless, particularly in its time. According to literary critic and writer Walter Pater (1839-1894), a key Romantic tendency was "the addition of strangeness to beauty" (Lynch and Stillinger 18), which for example corresponds with the notion of the sublime and Keats's attention to pleasure and pain (Lynch and Stillinger 18). Ironically, Frankenstein's vision is to create a majestic and beautiful being, picking out prime body parts from the graveyard (F 45[7]); however, when combined the beautiful parts looks strange, horrible even (F 50). The ambivalence of beauty can additionally be considered in relation to the stylistic elements in the period. Apart from literary fragments, as mentioned above, the use of poetic symbolism was prevalent in the period (Abrams 239). There is an element of mystery in the use of symbolism, which is demonstrated in a quote by Percy Bysshe Shelley: "I always seek in what I see, the likeness of something beyond the present and tangible object" (Abrams 239). The symbol thus derived "from a world-view in which objects are charged with a significance beyond their physical qualities" (Abrams 239). Hence, the symbol suggested indefiniteness and had deceptive abilities (Abrams 394). In *Frankenstein*, light and fire symbolize the duality of invention, enlightenment, and progress and the quest for knowledge allegorizes the dangers of unlimited science.


## The rise of the Gothic novel

In the early nineteenth century, the Gothic novel or the Gothic romance flourished (Abrams 152). It was first initiated by Horace Walpole's novel *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* in 1764 (Abrams 152, Lynch and Stillinger 584), which introduced the word 'Gothic' to the literary scene. The term 'Gothic' is part of the revival of features from the medieval romance that took place in the

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[7] All references to this edition of *Frankenstein* will be referred to with a capital f.

period (Lynch and Stillinger 584), mentioned earlier. In addition, the romance was considered a primitive forerunner of the modern novel (Lynch and Stillinger 26). That is, like the Romantic period poets, Gothic writers too focused on the past and sought to revive what was old. For example, writing in a literary period that stressed imagination, the Gothic reintroduced Spenserian and Shakespearean fairy magic and witchcraft that had been suppressed by the emphasis on reason during the Enlightenment (Lynch and Stillinger 18). Thus, the Gothic can be considered yet another attempt to "renew the literature of the present by reworking the past" (Lynch and Stillinger 26). In the readers, this move back to the past was accompanied by a sensation of regression and thus terror due to the feeling of being present in a premodern, pre-rational state (Lynch and Stillinger 26). Hence, Gothic writers often turned to an archaic past setting in medieval Europe involving gloomy castles and devious, dubious characters (Lynch and Stillinger 26). In these terms, *Frankenstein* clearly adheres to the Gothic characterization; it is set in the past in various European settings, mainly Switzerland, and involves ambiguous characters with doubtful intentions including the incredible and immoral creation of a being that turns out to be a 'monster' haunting its creator. Thus, the Gothic investigated abnormal circumstances and moved away from "things as they are" (Lynch and Stillinger 26). The employment of supernatural or seemingly supernatural events and characters in the Gothic contributed to the violation of "moral and social boundaries" (Goetsch 41-42). In other words, "the supernatural … is the manifestation … of chaos and disruption" (Day 36). The family as a symbol of order "is threatened by illegitimate relationships between characters (incest, sexual rivalry), the patriarchal abuse of power, the confusion of gender roles, and the dynamics of role changes" (Goetsch 42): In *Frankenstein*, the family dynamic can be read as dysfunctional. The attention to the nature of power and domination would later be described as sadism and masochism (Lynch and Stillinger 26-27), that is, destructive sexuality. "In the long run Gothic became a label for the macabre, mysterious, supernatural, and terrifying, especially the *pleasurably* terrifying, in literature" (Lynch and Stillinger 584). The pleasurable terrifying in the Gothic matches the aforementioned combination of pain and pleasure: "The quest for pleasure and selfhood are, in the gothic fantasy, always transformed into a quest for pain that ends in self-destruction" (Day 92). Due to that tendency, Gothic novelists were also known as the terror school (Lynch and Stillinger 585).

Paradoxically, while the Romantic period poets' criticized the cheap, commercial novels they were simultaneously attracted to and thus inspired by Gothic literature: "Signs of the poets' acquaintance with the terror school of novel writing show up in numerous well-known

Romantic poems – from *the Rime of the Ancient Mariner* to *Manfred*" (Lynch and Stillinger 585). *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834) serves as an important intertextual reference in *Frankenstein*. Hence, the romantic poet's association with gothic novelists can be described as a love-hate relationship (Lynch and Stillinger 585). Thus, despite the occasional critique, the two literary forms share thematic elements nevertheless and must be considered in relation to one another, especially given the shared period and context. In Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817), he describes a counterpoint to the poetry that aimed at reviving the wonder of the familiar, which was "a poetry that instead was founded on frank violation of natural laws and the ordinary course of events" (Lynch and Stillinger 17). The latter, including Gothic novels, was an element in some of Coleridge's poems with "occult powers and unknown modes of being" (Lynch and Stillinger 17-18). Furthermore, in Byron we see a longing for death, the fascination of the forbidden, and the allure of the satanic hero, who is both terrifying and seductive (Lynch and Stillinger 18). Thus, the complex and ambivalent aspects of human nature were investigated in both the period's Romantic poetry and Gothic novels, which has been exemplified in this section. Hence, the Gothic novel is a product of the Romantic period and vice versa, along with the increased focus on individualism, the aspirations of man as well as the mysteries of the human mind, with a particular stress on a gloomy atmosphere and the uncanny in the Gothic. However, it can be argued that the Gothic was more pessimistic about the striving ambitions of man that tended to be glorified by some of the Romantic period poets. In other words, human downfall was intensified in the Gothic writings, which is certainly the case in *Frankenstein*.

Various Romantic period poets began to examine the human mind and mental states through their attention to dreams, nightmares and altered consciousness (Lynch and stillinger 18, Goetsch 30). It can be argued that Frankenstein's dream gives access to an understanding of his deeper improper desires. Not only did the Romantic period focus on the human mind and inner consciousness; it also emphasized psychological extremes (Lynch and Stillinger 18). According to Day, the Gothic reveals the dark side of human nature that was later analyzed in modern psychology (165). Frankenstein's psyche is represented in a strange unity between creator and creation. "In Gothic fiction the process of self-alienation is often visualized by the sudden appearance of a monstrous double" (Goetsch 12), which is largely exemplified in *Frankenstein*. In addition, doubles are "projections of the monstrousness of the human characters" (Day 39). The double either mirrors one character in another, or involves a division of a character's self (Goetsch 42). The protagonist's inability to recognize the double demonstrates the estrangement from his

better self (Goetsch 12). Overall, "the descent into the gothic underworld becomes a descent into the self in which the protagonists confront their own fears and desires and are transformed, metamorphosed, doubled, fragmented, and destroyed by this encounter" (Day 27). In other words, the Gothic works with problematized identities; Gothic fictions emphasize the contrast of virtue and vice in the same character (Goetsch 42). Thus, the Gothic tends to deal with villain-heroes (Hume 287). In addition, the Gothic character tends to be ridiculous and often falls victim to "his own ridiculous delusions and obtuseness" (Day 98-99). As an overreacher in the search for power, pleasure, and godhood (Day 17) the Gothic hero attempts to dominate his world; instead the Gothic world controls the protagonists "reducing them to a state of nonbeing" (Day 19). Frankenstein's lack of identity is particularly reflected in the nameless monster. In sum, according to Day, the Gothic protagonist is:

> victimatized, isolated, in a sadomasochistic relationship both to the Other and to itself. It is in a constant process of transformation and metamorphosis, which is the manifestation of its doubled, fragmented nature. Doubling, then, is not simply a convention, but is the essential reality of the self in the Gothic world. Once the protagonist enters that world, the identity begins to break up. The line between the self and the Other begins to waver, and the wholeness and integrity of the self begins to collapse (Day 21-22).

The Gothic has remained immensely popular since its literary establishment, which is evident from the presence of its legacy in today's horror fiction and popular culture that continues to put a stress on the supernatural, the terror, violence, disturbed human beings and so forth. In addition, readers continue to seek out haunting tales. In other words, Gothic literature can be considered early horror fiction. The Gothic survived into post-romantic literature[8] and spread to the United States of America[9] (Lynch and Stillinger 584). Thus, across the Atlantic, the American Romantic period took place (Abrams 236, 274), and the American Gothic equivalent came to be known as Dark Romanticism.

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[8] For example the Brönte sisters' fiction in the Victorian period, such as Emily's Wuthering Heights (1847).
[9] For example Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) in the United States.

## Mary Shelley's gothic influence

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's (born Godwin) *Frankenstein* has been described as the most enduring Gothic novel (Lynch and Stillinger 584). According to Esther Schor, today Mary Shelley is everywhere (2). The novel's influence is evident from various film adaptations and popular culture's ongoing inspiration from the tale[10]. According to Day, "the gothic fantasy often appears as a cautionary tale, warning of the dangers of egotism and self-indulgence" (61); a description that fits Frankenstein in his careless effort to fulfil his own desires by creating a human being. *Frankenstein* is often considered an admonitory example of creation in relation to debates regarding ethics of cloning or stem cell engineering (Mellor 9).

Shelley was surrounded by literary influences being the daughter of feminist Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and philosopher and novelist William Goodwin (1756-1836), and she was the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley, from whom she found much inspiration and motivation (Lynch and Stillinger 25). Godwin wrote a chilling novel called *Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) on surveillance and entrapment with the aim to rapidly and ultimately affect the reader; a theme that also dominates *Frankenstein* in the shape of the novel's cat and mouse game (Lynch and Stillinger 25). In that way, Shelley can be said to have made a tribute to her parent's fictions (Lynch and Stillinger 25). Among the dubious characters that frequently served as the Romantic period's protagonists was Prometheus: "the hero of classical mythology, who is Satan-like in setting himself in opposition to God, but who, unlike Satan, is the champion rather than the enemy of the human race" (Lynch and Stillinger 20). Percy Shelley had this character central to his mythmaking; he was, however, redefined by Mary Shelley since *Frankenstein* or the Modern Prometheus (as the original title went) did not champion humankind, on the contrary (Lynch and Stillinger 20). As has been mentioned in the above, Shelley challenged and distanced herself from Romantic conceptions of idealism (Goetsch 94-95) in *Frankenstein*.

Mary Shelley is often considered in relation to the Satanic School of British Romanticism headed by Byron and Percy Shelley (Schor 2). It was in the company of the aforementioned writers she invented the story of Frankenstein at the age of eighteen (Mellor 9). After having read horror stories to each other one evening in Geneva, Percy Shelley, Byron, Byron's doctor, William Polidori (1795-1821), and herself, agreed to write a thrilling horror story each (Mellor 10). Shelley struggled; however, a conversation between Byron and her husband

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[10] The most recent may be the series The Frankenstein Chronicles from 2015 and 2017.

regarding experiments on 'the principle of life' triggered in her a vision of a student kneeling beside his creation (Mellor 10). In addition, her own anxiety as a parent is encapsulated in the tale (Mellor 10).

## LITERARY MODERNISM AND FITZGERALD

This section seeks to provide an overview of the literary movement in which *The Great Gatsby* was written. F. Scott Fitzgerald's unclarified position within the movement will be taken into consideration. According to Abrams, Fitzgerald was one of the American prose fiction modernists (276); however, it is more accurate to consider him a writer of the Modernist period. He portrayed the spirit of the age in a rather old-fashioned Romantic manner, rather than completely adhering to complex Modernist conventions. Bruce Stone argues, "in the pantheon of literary modernism, Fitzgerald is in some ways an anomalous figure" (133). In other words, Fitzgerald's role in Modernism is an ongoing discussion that this thesis does not attempt to participate in. Instead, Fitzgerald's unsettled status is acknowledged and it will be pointed out in this section, while overall Modernist traits will be accounted for.

According to M. H. Abrams, "The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the twentieth century, but especially after World War I (1914-18)" (226) where unprecedented and rapid literary innovations took place (Abrams 226). However, modernist literature can be traced back to the late nineteenth century (Abrams 226) with the Aesthetic Movement insisting on 'art for art's sake' (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1887). Other forerunners of Modernism were thinkers who questioned traditional values of social organization, religion, morality, and the human self, such as Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Fredrick Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud (Abrams 226, Ramazani and Stallworthy 1889). In addition, avant-garde groups, advocating for sweeping innovation in the arts flourished in Europe in the decade prior to World War I (Ramazani and Stallworthy 2056), which was an essential influencing factor among early modernists. The majority of critics agrees on the peak of literary Modernism around the years of the First World War where a poetic revolution began to occur (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1897), which in particular was strengthened by the horrid war experiences "endorsing the chaos of shattered belief, the fragility of language and of the human subject" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1904)). Overall, literature began once again to change with the tide.

## Changing times

Similar to the Enlightenment, prominent thinkers such as the aforementioned in anthropology, psychology, and science, had started questioning traditional conceptions of life and the world in their discoveries of alternative truths. *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as a grotesque representation of one man's isolated alternative truth; one, however, far from established conventions and logic. Furthermore, in the beginning of the twentieth century scientific revolutions and advances in technology transformed society and everyday life. The mass-production of cars (Henry Ford), or the automobile, "was the backbone of economic growth" (Foner 771) in America. In *The Great Gatsby*, the narrator Nick Carraway admires Gatsby's fancy car (GG 64[11]); Gatsby's lifestyle demonstrates American consumerism and materialism (Magnum 71). In the first half of the twentieth century, transformations were both driven by ideas and technological progress (Loeffelholz 1840), which altered traditional notions of the world.

World War I spurred "major shifts in attitude toward Western myths of progress and civilization. The postwar disillusion of the 1920s resulted, in part, from the sense of utter social and political collapse during a war in which unprecedented millions were killed" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1891). In *The Great Gatsby,* the Great War serves as a means to his dream due to the neutrality of his uniform that disguises his background, which makes Daisy notice him. Furthermore, the feeling of disillusionment is portrayed in the novel through the perspective of Nick. As is the tendency, wars spur development. World War I mobilized the United States' industries and technologies (Loeffelholz 1837). While the rest of Europe recovered from the Great War, American prosperity and investment flourished (Foner 771). In addition, the young generation consisting of newly affluent people began to challenge former norms of self-expression in their insistence on a more tolerant and permissive style of life (Loeffelholz 1840), thus creating further tensions between old and new values. This scenario is captured in *The Great Gatsby;* Gatsby certainly proves a challenge to the old values by representing both prosperity in the form of 'new money' and the extravagance of the day for example with his possession of a hydroplane (GG 48). Similar to Frankenstein's scientific experiments, Gatsby's approach to technology is linked to his dream; he must appear wealthy to attract Daisy. One might suggest that they both employ modernity to reach their goals. In the decade following World War I, the societal attitude was

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[11] All references to this edition of *The Great Gatsby* will be referred to with a double capital g.

captured in the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age (Foner 769); the latter term is ascribed to Fitzgerald who invented the term (Abrams 276). "With its flappers (young, sexually liberated women), speakeasies (nightclubs that sold liquor in violation of Prohibition), and a soaring stock market fueled by easy credit and a get-rich-quick outlook, it was a time of revolt against moral rules inherited from the nineteenth century" (Foner 769-770). Both Gatsby and Fitzgerald himself fit into this atmosphere and attitude. The detachment from moral rules is demonstrated in Gatsby's questionable commercial activities.

Despite the progress and high spirits, the majority of Americans did not share in the prosperity (Foner 774) and suppressive strategies such as the Prohibition, censorship, and lack of free speech made a strong contrast to the notion of American freedom. In *The Great Gatsby*, the Prohibition arguably serves as Gatsby's source of income as the demand for liquor makes his trade as so-called bootlegger extremely profitable; as such, Gatsby's realization of the American dream is dubious in various ways. Furthermore, ethnic control was a reality and racial relations were tense (Foner 785). *The Great Gatsby* has been read in relation to race and ethnicity with the attention to hints in the novel confirming Gatsby as not quite white; however, that is an area that is continuously debated. Overall, American prosperity was accompanied by criticism. Despite the popularity of American consumer goods and popular culture in Europe, some Americans considered the country a "repressive cultural wasteland" (Foner 786). The ambivalence of the American situation in the twenties is certainly addressed by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* with Nick's realization of the erroneous power and amorality of the East. The hotchpotch of horrid war experiences, American conservative politics, and cultural materialism resulted in disillusioned and alienated American artists and writers who, as a response, emigrated to London or Paris in the pursuit of a more unrestricted lifestyle and an enhanced artistic and literary scene (Foner 786, Abrams 276). These American objectors and in some cases exiles, the so-called Lost Generation, included Fitzgerald (Foner 786).


## Characteristics of literature in Modernism

The rapid change in society prompted a literary reaction: "literature could not stand still, and modern writers sought to create forms that could register these profound alterations in human experience" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1890). Thus, it was a time of literary experimentation (Abrams 276). The most influential interwar modernist literature "was marked by persistent and multidimensional experimentation in subject matter, form, and style in all the literary genres"

(Abrams 285). The characteristics in literary Modernism varies from writer to writer, however, they share the deliberate and radical dissociation from certain traditional Western arts as well as culture (Abrams 226). In other words, modernist writers reacted to the state of society that could no longer sustain traditional conventions. Modernism can be approached as a reaction to Romanticism similar to Romanticism's reaction to the Enlightenment. Even though Modernism can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, the term largely applies to literature produced in the interwar period (Abrams 275), in which literary alterations resemble the "transformation of traditional society under the pressure of modernity" (Loeffelholz 1847). Literature following World War I is generally termed High Modernism (Abrams 226), with T. S. Eliot's (1888-1965) poem *The Waste Land* (1922) as one of the most prominent High Modernist works (Loeffelholz 1847). Its literary influence and significance is suggested with Fitzgerald's use of the title as an intertextual reference in *The Great Gatsby:* The desolate landscape between West Egg and New York City is described as a waste land (GG 23-24). In *Frankenstein*, the ultimate wasteland is the artic desert. Fitzgerald refers to Eliot's poem to underline the moral disenchantment of the day, which was considered a significant aspect among the Modernists. However interestingly, it can be argued that Fitzgerald does not solely belong to Modernism, as mentioned in the beginning of this section. In some instances, he fits the Modernist conventions whereas in other ways he strongly deviates from them. The move away from Romanticism is arguably not a break he fully participated in.

Critique of bourgeois art assumptions and Victorian ideals resulted in a breach between writers and the public, which led to a sense of 'alienation' from the established order and society in the Modernist writers (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1887). Modernist manifestos were published, thus publicly declaring their ambitions, separation, and revolutionary opinions (Ramazani and Stallworthy 2056). Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) similarly functioned as a defense of the new literary experimentation of the Romantic period (Loeffelholz 1978). The British philosopher poet T. E. Hulme (1883-1917) led a literary avant-garde group that aimed at substituting blurry, messy, and sentimental Romanticism and Victorianism with a harder, dryer, and saner literature (Ramazani and Stallworthy 2056). In other words, to some extent Modernism included a reinstatement of neoclassical tendencies with the dissociation from flights of fancy and poets overwhelmed with feeling resulting in mysterious literary artistry, which challenges the conception of Fitzgerald as Modernist. An example of literary innovation in the period was the rise of imagism. The Imagist movement stressed the importance of immediate, "hard, clear, precise images" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1897). It was a reaction against so-called "Romantic fuzziness

and facile emotionalism in poetry" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1897). This dissociation is difficult to apply to Fitzgerald since he represented the exact same description with his Romantic airiness, the sense of something transcendent and mystical, and a somewhat antiquated depth of feeling in his style, which do not fit into the Modernist pattern, on the contrary. It seems Fitzgerald shared the 'special sensitivity of the artist' that arguably was a hold-over from the Romantics. It is perhaps most adequate to place Fitzgerald in between isms. Consider the following passage that portrays Gatsby's car: "It was a rich cream colour, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper-boxes and tool-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of windshields that mirrored a dozen suns" (GG 64). The quote involves a description of a modern object, the automobile, which is arguably portrayed in a Romantic manner. At any rate, the use of heavy symbolism and hyperbolic language can be considered too sentimentalist to correspond with hard, clear, and dry images.

Paradoxically, the process of making literature new was accompanied by a repulsion with certain aspects of modernity and thus the rejection of the newfangled changing times. The same was the case among the Romantic period poets, but it was in a very general sense. Some modernist writers "questioned the capacity of science to provide accounts of subjective experience and moral issues and elevated the metaphorical language of poetry over the supposed literal accuracy of scientific description" (Loeffelholz 1845). *The Great Gatsby* is certainly a novel that contributes to this literary description of human occurrences in the world involving questions of right and wrong depicted in metaphorical prose. In addition, mass-produced products like "the 'gramophone' and canned goods ("tins"), are objects of revulsion in Eliot's *Waste Land*" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1890). *The Great Gastby*'s "images of automobiles, parties, and garbage heaps seem to capture the contradictions of a consumer society" (Loeffelholz 2148). For Fitzgerald, "modernity was simultaneously a source of seduction and revulsion" (Lee 130). Hence, much modernist literature is in a sense anti-modern: the changes accompanied by modernity is interpreted as an experience of destabilization and loss (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1890, Loeffelholz 1847). This is an atmosphere that is central to the world of the gothic as well. As is suggested in the title, *The Waste Land* "represents the modern world as a scene of ruin" (Loeffelholz 1847). With this atmosphere came a tense condition of existential loneliness in the new fictional selfhood (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902), which was a tendency in the Romantic period as well. Loneliness and seclusion is a concurrent theme in *The Great Gatsby*. In addition, it can be claimed that "wastelands serve as metaphors for the mental state of the protagonists" (Day 169).

In order to make literature relevant for new times the literary alterations involved a deliberate violation of literary practices among the modernist writers (Abrams 227). However, there was disagreement on the matter. Some insisted on the importance of inspiration from literary tradition whereas others found it derivative and antiquated, and for still others previous literature was treated with irony; some considered it crucial to include popular culture in the literature while others rejected it as commercial trash; some saw opportunities in highlighting political and social struggles through literature whereas others wanted art to be an independent domain (Loeffelholz 1840). This complexity is indicative of the variety of modernist stances, which stresses the fact that it is difficult to describe Modernism with a fixed form; it is rather a living entity. In other words, some writers can be considered more Modernist than others, which Fitzgerald demonstrates. Nevertheless, modernist writers agreed that literature should represent the harsh postwar world of loss, rather than disguising it: "Order, sequence, and unity in works of art might well express human desires for coherence rather than reliable intuitions of reality" (Loeffelholz 1847). As a result, much high modernist art appears to be constructed out of fragments[12] (Loeffelholz 1848). Overall, "Modernist literature is often notable for what it omits: the explanations, interpretations, connections, summaries, and distancing that provide continuity, perspective, and security in earlier literatures" (Loeffelholz 1848). *The Great Gatsby* omits the perspective of Gatsby; the only narrative voice is Nick. In addition, Gatsby's complex identity is kept from the reader to begin with; he is depicted mysteriously. Modernist literature is arbitrary (Loeffelholz 1848), which makes the reading experience challenging: "if meaning lies obscured deep underneath the ruins of modern life, then it must be effortfully sought out" (Loeffelholz 1848). The writers were no longer gifted poetic geniuses, but rather craftsmen who wrote for the skilled reader. Consequently, the audience was limited: "high modernism demanded of its ideal readers an encyclopedic knowledge of the traditions it fragmented or ironized" (Loeffelholz 1848). In contrast, Fitzgerald wrote for the general public in order to earn money. A gateway to the public heart for modernist writers were the widely read popular magazines (Loeffelholz 1849). Fitzgerald's accomplishments can be linked to his productiveness. During his career, he wrote a large amount of short stories for popular magazines for a fine salary, while producing more serious literature in the form of his novels on the side. Through the popular magazines, many readers enjoyed his 'light reading'. Like the Gothic novelists, it can be argued that Fitzgerald's work was not categorized as 'high' art compared to the complexity of High Modernist literature.

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[12] Consider Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" from the Romantic period, which can be considered a fragment in itself.

Poetry as well as fiction was transformed in the Modern period. The novel as a genre contributed to the modernist renewal of worldly representations: "The form defies prescriptions and limits. Yet its variety converges on persistent issues such as the construction of the self within society, the reproduction of the real world, and the temporality of human experiences and of narrative" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1901). In *The Great Gatsby*, the formation of identity and the imitation of the 'ideal' world are significant themes; Gatsby shapes his self to suit Daisy's world. As mentioned above, modernist literature should represent reality. Many modernists believed that "realty existed … only as it was perceived" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902). Thus, the nineteenth century authoritative narrator was substituted for "the impressionistic, flawed, even utterly unreliable narrator" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902), which was in accordance with the modernist assumption that truth is subjective and thus biased (Loeffelholz 1849). In *The Great Gatsby*, Nick can be considered unreliable due to the ambivalence of his narration and because there is no counterpoint to his perspective as the analysis will show. A naïve or marginal person was often chosen to convey the point of view in order to represent the actuality of bewilderment and dissent (Loeffelholz 1849). Nick is an outsider from the Midwest who places himself in the wild Roaring Twenties. In relation to that, modernist writers sometimes included "the speech of the uneducated and the inarticulate, the colloquial, slangy, and the popular" (Loeffelholz 1849). In *The Great Gatsby*, the slang of the day is included and the language of certain characters is written as it is spoken. "The real was offered, thus, as refracted and reflected in the novel's representative consciousness" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902), which is Nick in the case of *The Great Gatsby*. Hence, focus on inner mental life was a prominent feature in modernist literature, as it was in the Romantic period. The truth of reality had turned inwards, however, as "utterly tricky, scattered, fragmentary, sporty, now illuminated, now twilit, now quite occluded" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902). Freud's psychoanalysis to some extent inspired this attention to human consciousness and the complexity and inner tumult as the reality of the human mind (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902). This was implemented with unrestrained literary tools such as 'automatic writing' and 'stream of consciousness' (Abrams 227), involving "a flow of reflections, momentary impressions, disjunctive bits of recall and half-memory, simultaneously revealing both the past and the way the past is repressed" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902). There is plenty of inner dialogue in Nick's perspective, which involves a fragmentary narrative structure (Day 168) and incoherent thoughts; Nick tends to change his mind, hence his presumed unreliability. Modernist writers were additionally likely to use the more conventional technique called 'free indirect style' in which they

would "enter their characters' minds, to speak as it were on their behalf" (Ramazani and Stallworthy 1902). It has been argued that Fitzgerald is in fact Nick (Bechtel 124); it is Fitzgerald commenting on the tale. In both modernist poetry and fiction, "allusions to literary, historical, philosophical, or religious details of the past often keep company, in modernist works, with vignettes of contemporary life, chunks of popular culture, dream imagery, and symbolism drawn from the author's private repertory of life experiences" (Loeffelholz 1849). Fitzgerald's attention to the past cannot be considered Modernist to the same extent that his description of the present can. He was fond of popular culture, which was both part of his creative language and his public image (Prigozy 2). In addition, the portrayals and illustrations of Fitzgerald's fictional heroes resembled himself, thus linking the author with his protagonists (Prigozy 9-10, McAdams 656). Parts of Fitzgerald's life is reflected in *The Great Gatsby*, which is further demonstrated beneath.

## F. Scott Fitzgerald

With his *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), Francis Scott Fitzgerald captured the flamboyant and pleasure-seeking attitude of the 1920s (Abrams 276); an image he himself seemed to symbolize in his role as celebrity author (Loeffelholz 2147). Fitzgerald encapsulated the essence of the Jazz Age in his writing, which is certainly the case in *The Great Gatsby*. According to Ruth Prigozy, the life and work of Fitzgerald were intertwined, thus making him part creator, part victim of the turbulent twenties (1).

Fitzgerald was from a middle class neighborhood in St. Paul, Minnesota and spent much of his childhood in Buffalo and Syracuse, New York (Loeffelholz 2147-48). His family was underprivileged; support from an aunt gave him the opportunity for higher schooling (Loeffelholz 2148). During World War I, while stationed in Montgomery, Alabama, he courted the beautiful Zelda Sayre who rejected him, which resulted in his resolute aim to make a fortune in New York City and win her nevertheless (Loeffelholz 2148). His novel *This Side of Paradise* (1920) became a bestseller leading to prosperity and fame at the age of twenty-four, and he reached his goal (Loeffelholz 2148). Scott and Zelda lived extravagantly; they were party animals, immensely good-looking, and made great representations of the culture of youth, Zelda being a flapper (Prigozy 8-9). The Fitzgeralds quickly spent the money his early authorship provided, and more (Loeffelholz 2148). In order to live more inexpensively, they moved to Europe where he published his most successful novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925), which remains a classic to this day (Loeffelholz 2148). *The Great Gatsby* encapsulates the nightmare of the American dream with a compact structure and

dazzling style (Loeffelholz 2148). Publishing short stories in popular magazines, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Redbook*, gave him a fine income while composing his novels (Magnum 72-73, Loeffelholz 2148). He managed to write well as an artist while entertaining a grand audience (Magnum 71). Despite his productiveness, which is evident from his total of 178 short stories, the Fitzgeralds remained in debt (Loeffelholz 2148). Scott turned to the bottle while Zelda had a mental breakdown that broadly lasted her lifetime (Loeffelholz 2148). Thus, the Fitzgeralds created their own image until they finally turned into their own creative myth, which proved destructive in the end (Prigozy 11). Consequently, "In the 1920s [Fitzgerald] stood for all-night partying, drinking, and the pursuit of pleasure while in the 1930s he stood for the gloomy aftermath of excess" (Loeffelholz 2147).

Later in life, Fitzgerald tried to dissociate himself from the image he had created in the twenties and instead stress his role as a writer (Prigozy 6). In other words, when he was young he busily sought to be a personality while later he matured into aiming at being a true artist; he succeeded in both (Prigozy 25). Aspects of his own life seem to appear in his works. In his short stories, he addressed delicate subjects such as alcoholism and suicide, expatriation, disillusionment, and dissipation (Mangum 71), which seem to suggest a dark strain in his authorship. *The Great Gatsby* resembles his own early courtship of Zelda (Onderdonk 190), his extravagant living, and the time in which he was living, but it also embodies an element of tragedy and destruction. Many writers of the modernist period identified themselves with the American scene and portrayed specific regions in their works; "Their perspective on the regions was sometimes celebratory and sometimes critical" (Loeffelholz 1851), the latter being the case in *The Great Gatsby*.

Fitzgerald was criticized for being "a foolish, drunken failure whose degradation was matched only by that of his mad, suicidal wife" (Prigozy 14), and acclaimed as "a beautiful writer, his best writing as graceful and truthful as ever, and … a heroic man who was defeated and kept on fighting" (Prigozy 24).


In the above sections, *Frankenstein* and *The Great Gatsby* have been contextualized. It will often prove a challenge to place a writer and artist in a certain category without the concerned being pigeonholed. This especially applies to Fitzgerald, which is demonstrated in the above section. He certainly was among Modernist writers, who similarly have been considered as such due to certain literary traits; however, it is debatable whether he was fully a Modernist. While Modernist traits can be detected in his works, he simultaneously deviates from Modernism. In addition, both writers

must be acknowledged for their work on its own right. In order to examine the thesis, the general tendencies of the literary periods must be considered and acknowledged but they need not dominate the study. As two distinct literary periods, the differences between Romanticism and Modernism are predictable and might explain why Gatsby is rarely read in relation to Gothicism. However, some similarities between the periods can be traced, which have been pointed out in the above section. The similarities include the overall tendency to react against the established order; it can be considered a matter of course. Thus, both periods stressed the need for literary innovation. In addition, both periods seem to encapsulate a pessimistic attitude towards modernity and progress; in other words, both novels have an element of societal critique that is expressed in different ways. The element of isolation and disorder in writers and literary subjects are common traits as well. However overall, any similarities must be considered in the respective contexts; the intentions behind may differ and the forms may differ. Nevertheless, the presence of certain similarities may justify a reading of Gatsby in relation to Gothicism. Furthermore, Fitzgerald's indefinable position might enable an unconventional approach to *The Great Gatsby*. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, Gatsby will be considered in relation to Frankenstein. One novel will be analyzed in accordance with another in the following analyses; *Frankenstein* serves as a frame for the study of *The Great Gatsby*.


## ANALYSIS OF FRANKENSTEIN

In the following section, *Frankenstein* will be analyzed in terms of limitless ambition and grotesque illusion, isolation and alienation, identity struggles, and overreaching and downfall: hubris and nemesis. The analysis will provide a basis for the subsequent analysis of *The Great Gatsby*.


### Limitless ambition and grotesque illusion

Victor Frankenstein fits the description of Gothic male characters that are characterized by their active imagination and curiosity (Day 18), which enables them to fulfill the Gothic destiny of destruction. Already as a child, Frankenstein is curious to "learn the hidden laws of nature" (F 28) and describes himself as "smitten with the thirst for knowledge" (F 28). Thus, as a child he is arguably unnaturally ambitious. Thus, it is no coincidence that he improves rapidly (F 44) at the university.

It can be claimed, that Frankenstein's experiment involving the search for the principle of life is linked to the death of his mother (Goetsch 85, Cantor 114). He consequently wants to be able to "renew life" (F 47) and thus reject death. Cantor argues, "one can hear the accents of his uncompromising idealism, his hope that the mind could somehow triumph over the brute fact of death" (114-115). Hence, his ambitious enthusiasm comes to use in order to prevent further trauma. In addition, "Victor Frankenstein, like Prometheus, desires to be the benefactor of mankind" (Cantor 103). Frankenstein notes, "I had begun life with benevolent intentions, and thirsted for the moment when I should put them in practice and make myself useful to my fellow beings" (F 87). However, this is not his sole motivation. "Wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!" (F 32). On the surface, Frankenstein's intentions can be considered benevolent. However, the glory that is accompanied by such a deed, as he himself stresses, makes the act less heroic. Shelley criticizes the Promethean desire as egotistical (Crimmins 561). Hence, Frankenstein not only wants to aid other people; he wants to be praised. "Driven by his desire for glory, he does not aim at knowledge so much as at power over nature" (Goetsch 84). Thus, his ambitions are linked with the glory of such a task to the extend that he becomes unstoppable and carries his self-implemented task through.

Robert Walton serves as the novel's frame narrator (Goetsch 81). As a voyager and explorer he resembles Frankenstein in terms of enthusiastic ambition to the extent that he can be considered Frankenstein's alter ego (Mellor 17). Walton has "passionate enthusiasms for, the dangerous mysteries of ocean" (F 12). In other words, Frankenstein has more than one double (Levine 19, 21). Walton writes to his sister in letter one: "I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man" (F 6). Like Frankenstein, Walton wants to be a pioneer. "Frankenstein's urge to create life by himself shows his titanism, his longing to do something never before attempted by man" (Cantor 111). Walton further states: "These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger and death, and to induce me to commence this laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little boat" (F 6). Thus, like Frankenstein, Walton believes himself able to transcend every limitation in his desire to fulfill his task, which seems to be accompanied by a supercilious description of such a mission as child's play. In addition, his dreams are similarly connected to pride: "you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind … by discovering a passage near the pole … or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at

all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine" (F 6). Like Frankenstein, he considers himself a superior being and he prefers glory to wealth (F 7). Anne Mellor argues, "like Frankenstein, Walton, too, is driven far afield by heady Romantic ideals" (13). Walton reassures his sister that "I shall kill no albatross, therefore do not be alarmed for my safety, or if I should come back to you as worn and woeful as the 'Ancient Mariner'" (F 12). Here, Shelley employs an intertextual reference to Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. "The seagoing Walton identifies with the mariner because he too is an overreacher whose ambitions threaten to consign him to solitary despair; and Victor Frankenstein is even more like the mariner in his self-destructive, compulsive behavior" (Goodwin 99). Walton's remark emphasizes his careless attitude towards his own possible mistakes since he reassures his sister that he will not kill any albatrosses; that is, make any mistakes. Overall, Walton serves as a significant character in terms of setting the scene in relation to Frankenstein, as a being with the potential for the same destiny as Frankenstein due to his striving ambition and delusional approach to his craft. However, Frankenstein takes it to the next level (Dunn 409), so to speak.

Frankenstein is absorbed in his task to the extent that it he is engulfed in it (F 48): "My mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein, - more, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation" (F 41). His perseverance and venture are linked to "an almost supernatural enthusiasm" (F 44), stressing the element of ambivalence and madness in his complete absorption in his "great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, [until it] should be completed" (F 48). The image of Frankenstein as a hurricane (F 47) symbolizes his uncontrollable nature, which drives him towards his goal: "I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (F 47). Hence, Frankenstein's ambitious vision can be considered a grotesque illusion. His initial enthusiasm turns into madness (Goetsch 84); a frantic ardor (F 48). He refuses to acknowledge any limitations and consequences regarding the process of creating a human being in an unnatural manner, which makes him thoughtless. Therefore, his misconception leads to his downfall, which will be addressed further in the last section of the analysis. According to Day, the Gothic protagonist is in a state of enthrallment in the Gothic world with a "heightened apprehension and a restless curiosity about what may lie beyond conventional reality" (23), which consequently proves an illusion. The "object of desire becomes and object of disgust" (23). Ironically, Frankenstein becomes disillusioned (Goetsch 94) as his filthy creation (F 48) turns out to be a monster.

## Isolation and alienation

"Frankenstein is in a very real sense a higher being than those around him: he is more imaginative
and has greater creative powers. But for that reason he can no more fit into conventional society
than his monster can" (Cantor 129). There is a potential in Frankenstein's character for his isolation
since it can be indicated that he is not a social being. Due to his secluded lifestyle at the
Frankenstein home, he considers himself "totally unfitted for the company of strangers" (F 37),
describing his attitude to new countenances as affected by "invincible repugnance" (F 37). He only
values his accustomed relations (F 37). Similarly, Walton complains about his lack of a friends (F
9) while making strong demands to such a friendship: he wants to befriend a person "whose tastes
are like my own" (F 9). Hence, his ideal friend is Frankenstein, his own resemblance.

   Frankenstein's experiment preoccupies him to the extent that "the same feelings
which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so
many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long" (F 48). Frankenstein's "aspirations
alienate him from his family and society. While at Ingolstadt, he avoids contact with his family for
four years. Perhaps he chiefly wishes to forget his mother's death by concentrating on his studies. In
any case, he does not consider his father and Elizabeth's feelings" (Goetsch 84). In addition, his
isolation is connected to his questionable and dubious doings. Frankenstein's ultimate isolation is
connected to his deed. He performs his filthy creation in a "solitary chamber" (F 48). "In
psychological terms, Frankenstein is a classic case of sublimation … Victor's loneliness and
isolation is thus not accidental to his creativity. He must cut himself off from the rest of humanity to
achieve his goals, and his goals require that he do everything alone" (Cantor 111). Hence, in order
to avoid alienation Frankenstein isolates himself. In other words, it can be argued that Frankenstein
deep down is aware of his unethical deeds. "Any man with an unconventional vision runs the risk of
being regarded as inhuman by conventional society" (Cantor 128-129). Hence, Frankenstein can be
considered antisocial both in the sense that he tends to isolate himself and because he causes harm.
He considers his chamber a cell (F 48) and thus links it to a prison, stating, "I shunned my fellow-
creatures *as if* I had been guilty of a crime" (F 49, emphasis added). However, note that he does not
completely recognize the amorality of his doings, which is an aspect I will return to. The ultimate
isolation Frankenstein faces is the destruction of his friends and family. After the monster has the
blood of his first two victims on his hand, Frankenstein withdraws to a depressed suppression-like
state as a response to the consequences of his deeds: "I shunned the face of man; all sounds of joy

or complacency was torture to me; solitude was my only consolation – deep, dark, deathlike solitude" (F 87). The process of isolation enables Frankenstein's horrible doings, while his doings lead to his alienation and desolation.

   The monster encapsulates alienation in its pure form since his appearance proves a barrier for human contact, which ultimately blurs his humanity (Cantor 125). Even his own creator flights in fear (F 51), leaving the creature on its own. In other words, Frankenstein completely fails as a parent (Mellor 10). The monster asks himself, "where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses" (F 120). He is an abandoned infant, care failured by the only being who knows of his existence. The monster says to Frankenstein, "on you only had I any claim for pity and redress" (F 140). According to Sarah Goodwin, "perhaps the figure who most resembles the mariner is the monster. Like the mariner, the monster is extremely isolated, to the point where his solitude and suffering themselves are monstrous" (99). The monster's life begins with solitude and he is desperate, "finding [himself] so desolate" (F 101). Unlike Frankenstein, the monster yearns "for the solidarity of human community. He does not yearn for personally glorifying exploration but for socialization" (Dunn 414), but he never succeeds in transcending his alienation. The monster is incomprehensible for conventional society; what is clear is that he differs from ordinary people (Cantor 129). Hence, the monster "emerges as the innocent victim of man's 'prejudice' " (Seed 336). The immediate deterrence towards the monster is caused by his hideous appearance; however, it can additionally be read as his racial otherness (Mellor 22). Walton's initial observation of the monster is as follows: "a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island" (F 16). Mellor argues, "to read such a member of another race as 'savage' or monstrous is to participate in the cultural production of racist stereotypes" (22). Even the virtuous DeLacy family cannot accept the monster's deformity, and Frankenstein thus becomes a tale that reveals the limitations of natural goodness (Tannenbaum 110). Overall, through the perspective of the monster it is suggested that prejudice and bigotry seem to be human characteristics. The monster's alienation consequently leads to his monstrosity: "I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone?" (F 98). The monster "protests against his rejection by others. He is the social outcast who seeks to revenge himself on society" (Goetsch 89).

## Identity struggles

Issues of identity are exemplified in the *Frankenstein* with the doppelgänger motive in creator and creature; the monster is Frankenstein's double (Goetsch 91, Mellor 23, Cantor 117). In the role as Frankenstein's double or shadow, the monster is "acting out the deepest, darkest urges of his soul, his aggressive impulses" (Cantor 117), which Frankenstein deep down wants to perform but refuses to acknowledge (Day 140). Hence, "the being which Victor Frankenstein creates … mirrors in its outward form his own inward deformity" (Hume 286). In other words, the monster as the other "is an externalization of the conflicts of the creator" (Day 85). As the same being mirroring each other, they both share the feelings of being both powerful and alone in the world (Cantor 106-107). In addition, moral ambiguity is found in both characters: both share aspects of benevolence and immorality; neither of them have morally pure motives (Cantor 106). Consider Frankenstein's account of himself: "I wandered like an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond description … Yet my heart overflowed with kindness, and the love of virtue" (F 87). Note how this description fits the monster and thus underlines how intertwined the characters seem to be[13]. In the doubled relationship, voyeurism is a central Gothic motif that includes an element of enthrallment in the voyeur (Day 64). The monster desires to become an actor in the world when watching social life around him (F 123). The monster observes both the DeLacy family and Frankenstein (F 120, 70). The observation of another character becomes an act of watching one's self (Day 64); thus, the voyeur can be said to mirror the character being watched to the extent that the distant observer suddenly becomes involved in the doubled relationship as a participant (Day 66). Frankenstein narrates, "I trembled, and my heart failed within me, when, on looking up, I saw … the daemon at the casement … Yes, he had followed me in my travels" (F 171). In the passage, it is exemplified that the monster transcends the barrier between observer and participant in his relationship to Frankenstein. The two characters seem to share a similar role; their differences become increasingly blurred as the novel progresses (Goetsch 91), which the aforementioned quote seems to demonstrate. Frankenstein and the monster "both become guilty outsiders, lonely wanderers, without a home and partner" (Goetsch 91).

The presence of a complex hero-villain in the Gothic may be claimed to contribute to the double aspect in the characters. As mentioned earlier, both Walton, Frankenstein, and the monster are ambivalent in their motives and actions. Walton and Frankenstein can be considered

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[13] The portrayal of creator and creation as one and the same partly explains the common mistaken conception that Frankenstein is the monster (Mellor 9).

benevolent due to their good intentions regarding the human species in their attempt to enlighten the world. The monster is born good and commits the heroic deed of saving a child from drowning (F 141). However, all characters can additionally be considered selfish and corrupted. Frankenstein is a grandiose figure "whose undoubted stature is compounded of dark aspirations and great force of character" (Hume 287). Frankenstein is described as a "man with originally benevolent impulses and great potentiality for good. His striving for a more than human greatness destroys the warmth of his humanity" (Hume 286). Cantor argues, "Frankenstein's activity as a creator presents such a mixture of idealistic and self-serving motives that evaluating it in moral terms becomes difficult" (115). In other words, Frankenstein's good doings are accompanied with egotism, pride, and the want for glory and power (Cantor 105), while the monster becomes a revengeful murderer. Hence, one might argue that the characters are simultaneously heroic and corrupt. Their uncontrollable nature can be considered in relation to the behavior of a child: "the sensibility of the gothic arises from its exceptionally undirected and unregulated emotions. Adults play by the rules, but children allow games to get out of hand" (M. Brown 162). The complexity of Frankenstein arguably lies in the fact that he is both mad, heroic, and delusional as a child (Cantor 119). That is, *Frankenstein* involves issues of adolescence, more specifically the refusal to transcend into adulthood. His childish aspects undermine his heroic side due to his "fear of growing up, a hesitation at taking his place in the world of adult responsibility" (Cantor 111). Ironically, Frankenstein's inability to transcend into adulthood results in the neglect of his child. In addition, "the description of Frankenstein on his wedding night suggests an immature and nervous bridegroom, looking for anything to divert him from consummating his marriage" (Cantor 112). The fear of his relationship to Elizabeth strongly contrasts his possessiveness towards her (Cantor 110): "till death she was to be mine only" [14] (F 27).While Frankenstein is arguably unable to deal with love on various levels, the monster in contrast desires human contact and a companion (Cantor 124); he rationalizes the need for a species like himself, that is another monster, and demands of Frankenstein to create such a being to end his misery (F 144, Cantor 126). That is, human contact as a basic human need is explored in Frankenstein. Ironically, the monster's ability and need for human compassion exceed that of Frankenstein's. In other words, it can be argued that the monster seeks the conventional way of life, while Frankenstein refuses it.

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[14] Frankenstein's description of Elizabeth as his "more than sister" (F 27) suggests an incestuous relationship (Cantor 110), which is a common trait in the gothic (Day 80); however, it is not considered in this thesis.

In the aspiration of becoming great and glorified, Frankenstein's creation is a process of self-assertion and an act of identity making (Day 141) as a creator of life in an unconventional manner, which turns out to be an utter failure. Day argues, "the collapse of legitimation for their identity means that the male protagonists of the gothic fantasy are pursuing a chimera, longing for a status they can never attain" (96). For Day then, the identity issues the gothic characters have to deal with are connected to their grotesque illusion. As a product of the illusion, the monster consequently undergoes a severe existential crisis that stresses his lack of identity: "I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I?" (F 120). To that, he is nameless. He can be considered an outsider, an outcast, and a nobody, insignificant to the world apart from Frankenstein's. "No wonder the monster's skin doesn't fit. It lacks a properly positioned selfhood" (M. Brown 153). Hence, the monster's appearance can be considered a projection of his missing identity.

Finally, the issues of identity and self may contribute to the characters' inability to fully recognize their responsibility and faults. Frankenstein's errors are further blurred through the narration of Walton. "What a glorious creature must he have been in the days of his prosperity, when he is thus noble and godlike in ruin! He seems to feel his own worth, and the greatness of his fall" (F 217). Hence, it can be indicated that Walton encapsulates the Romantic period poet's praise of the flawed. It is through Walton's perspective that Frankenstein becomes heroic. However, "this positive evaluation is not fully supported by Frankenstein's own story" (Goetsch 83), which confirms Walton's unreliability. In addition, it seems Walton fails to learn from Frankenstein. His crew force him to abandon his mission and his reaction is as follows: "Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision: I come back ignorant and disappointed" (F 222). In his naïveté, Walton "remains more fascinated than deeply informed" (Dunn 409). Frankenstein and the monster's narratives can similarly be considered untrustworthy due to the lack of clear-sightedness and the evading of responsibility. Even though Frankenstein feels remorseful and guilty (F 87) and thus seemingly recognizes his own faults, his narrative proves to be contradictive:

> During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; *nor do I find it blamable*. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature, and I was bound towards him, to assure, as far was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty; but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attentions, because they included a

greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right

in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature. He showed unparalleled

malignity and selfishness, in evil (F 224, emphasis added).

In the above, it becomes clear that Frankenstein fails to recognize how far he has fallen

(Tannenbaum 112). He recognizes that the creation results from his madness; however, he justifies

his neglect of the monster with a Utilitarian explanation that validates the monsters misery, and

further rationalizes and disguises his own amoral deeds by stressing the exact same deeds in the

monster. Similarly, the monster justifies his crimes by blaming his power-mad creator for his vile

nature due to the fact that he made him hideous (Cantor 127). The monster exclaims, "I was

benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (F 98). In other words, the monster "asserts his

fundamentally benevolent nature, thwarted by an unjust society" (Clemit 37): "Am I to be thought

the only criminal, when all human kinds sinned against me?" he asks (F 228).

Frankenstein's final words are particularly contradictive or misleading: "Farewell,

Walton! Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently

innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have

myself been blasted in these hopes, yet another may succeed" (F 224). These final 'revelations'

seem to demonstrate that "Frankenstein dies without enlightenment" (Tannebaum 111). He alludes

to the fact that that "his ideal was not unworthy" (Clemit 37) and leaves open "the possibility of the

future success of similar quests for knowledge" (Clemit 35). In other words, Frankenstein never

shelves his inner most beliefs in the possible triumph of an ambitious quest despite his extreme

failure. According to Cantor, "both Frankenstein and the monster maintain to the end the idealist's

moral composure in the face of even his most disastrous attempts to act in the real world" (Cantor

132).

## Overreaching and downfall: hubris and nemesis

Promethean overreaching is a pervading theme in *Frankenstein* (Hume 285), in particular with

Frankenstein's intent to enlighten the world[15]: "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I

should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (F 47). As Frankenstein

fulfills his thwarted ambitions, it can be indicated that he acts out the process of overreaching since

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[15] Like Prometheus enlightened the human species with fire according to the Greek myth.

he 'succeeds' in mastering the creation of life by hand. In other words, Frankenstein employs "modern science to imitate God's creative powers" (Tannenbaum 102). Day argues, "the masculine archetype embodies selfish, egocentric impulses, often manifested as a desire to become godlike, or even to become God. Rooted in this identity is the impulse to impose one's will upon the world and other people and to do so by breaking moral and social laws; the masculine archetype can be satisfied only with power that is illegitimate" (76). Frankenstein's ambitions are additionally accompanied by a sense of control and lack of humility: attention is on Frankenstein's arrogance and narcissism (Goetsch 86). "Frankenstein does God's work, creating a man, but he has the devil's motives: pride and the will to power. He is himself a rebel, rejecting divine prohibitions and, like Satan, aspiring to become a god himself" (Cantor 105). He additionally yearns to receive God-like worship (Mellor 19): "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (F 47).

Frankenstein believes himself able to overcome death and thus master life. It is a capability that does not apply to human beings; it is exclusively connected to God. However, Frankenstein considers himself a creator. Thus, he exceeds the limits of man and thus transcends his position as a human being. Hence, Frankenstein commits hubris and suffers from it (Mellor 17); with hubris comes nemesis. Frankenstein experiences a major downfall due to his single-mindedness, persistence, pride, egotism, and utter disregard of boundaries. He is consequently destroyed; he arguably dies from exhaustion (F 225). Hence, Frankenstein becomes "a symbol of human suffering at the hands of the gods" (Cantor 104). Thus, Shelley contributes to "a mythic dramatization of the dangers of an unbridled idealism" (Cantor 108). The novel's theme of the remaking of man resembles the Romantic poet's goal of a spiritual regeneration of man's creativity; however, the novel puts an end to this glorious aim and human creativity is instead presented as dangerous since it cannot be controlled or predicted (Cantor 108-109). According to Cantor, Frankenstein is "the nightmare of Romantic idealism, revealing the dark underside to all the visionary dreams of remaking man that fired the imagination of Romantic myth-makers" (109).


## ANALYSIS OF THE GREAT GATSBY

In the following section, *The Great Gatsby* will be analyzed in accordance with the analysis of *Frankenstein*. The same four themes will be examined. Hence, it partly serves as a comparative

analysis. The analysis will provide the background for a discussion of whether Gatsby can be considered Gothic.

## Limitless ambition and grotesque illusion

Like Frankenstein, Jay Gatsby can be considered an idealist; He has faith in a dream that similarly turns out to be a delusion (Loeffelholz 2147). The active imagination that is found in the Gothic can be argued to fit Gatsby to a great extent. His dream is surrounded by a "creative passion" (GG 97) and like Frankenstein, he devotes himself to that dream completely:

> his heart was in a constant, turbulent riot. The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night. A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain … Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene with an oblivious embrace. For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing (GG 99-100).

This passage corresponds with the enthrallment of the Gothic protagonist and his desperate search for something beyond conventional reality. Gatsby "uses all of his creative powers to put his illusion into reality" (LaHurd 118). Hence, the quote reflects "the futility of his enterprise" (Bechtel 126). The narrator, Nick Carraway describes Gatsby as a character with a "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (GG 2) and an "extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness" (GG 2), which emphasize his ambitious traits. In addition, like in Frankenstein these attributes start at an early age (Railton 139). Gatsby's father describes him as a boy who was "bound to get ahead" (GG 176). Like Frankenstein, Gatsby works hard to fulfill his dream. Gatsby's father shows Nick a list that belonged to the young Gatsby including when and what he ought to occupy himself with during a day (GG 175). In other words, it is a list that helps him strive at bettering himself. Hence, he wants to improve himself in order to enable himself to accomplish his goal. According to the list, that for example include practices of sports, exercises, wall-scaling, elocution, reading of improving books, the study of needed inventions, and oddly enough the study of electricity (GG 176-176). The latter has strong connotations to Frankenstein's study and the almost fanatic work ethic is something the characters share.

Gatsby explains to Nick how he is attempting to forget something sad that happened to him (GG 67). That is, similar to Frankenstein Gatsby's ambitions may be associated with a tragic event; in Gatsby's case it is the loss of Daisy Fay Buchanan (Steinbrink 163). In terms of reclaiming Daisy, the obvious obstacles are the facts that Daisy is a married woman and more importantly her superiority (Long 270, 265). However, Gatsby does not consider these limits, which further makes him resemble Frankenstein. Gatsby is an "idealistic dreamer, a boat against the current seeking the past" (Rohrkemper 153, GG 183). In other words, Gatsby aims at conquering the past (Steinbrink 162), which is an aspect I will return to in the last section of this analysis. In other words, Gatsby wants to return to the moment in time when Daisy and himself were in love five years ago (GG 111). Gatsby's desire to bring Daisy back by redoing the past, can be claimed to resemble Frankenstein's aim at controlling life as a response to his mother's death. Thus, "Gatsby's devotion to Daisy verges on the preternatural" (Stone 124). His dream is connected to and is personified in Daisy who represents wealth and privilege (Kirkby 158, Loeffelholz 2147); she is the green light that tantalizes Gatsby (GG 22, Railton 140, Gizzo 78), which arguably resembles the element of enthrallment in the Gothic. Gatsby notes that Daisy's voice is full of money (GG 120), which might indicate that he is drawn towards her due to her status in society, which is destined through her wealth. Lisa Kirby argues that Gatsby "yearns for the prestige and financial extravagance that those in his peer group seem to possess so effortlessly" (154). After all, the girl he is after happens to be golden (GG 120). Hence, his shivalry is connected to the fact that he is chasing the 'king's daughter' (Bevilacqua 49, GG 120). With a princes comes a kingdom, and with a kingdom comes glory. However, it is a discussion and the general atmosphere that surrounds Gatsby seems to suggest that *The Great Gatsby* is a love story; Gatsby arguably does not consider the 'kingdom' that comes with her, all Gatsby wants is Daisy. In other words, for Gatsby money is inferior in comparison to the great object, which is also the case in Frankenstein. "Money and prestige mean little in themselves to Gatsby who is seeking what appears to be the truly golden dream, the love of Daisy Buchanan" (Solomon 189). Furthermore, according to Barbara Will, "what motivates Gatsby is not the desire for material betterment … but the evanescent and the intangible" (131). However, in order to win the intangible Daisy, money becomes an important tool. In other words, Gatsby strives for upward social mobility (Kirkby 153) in order to win Daisy "gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor" (GG 150). With his poor background, Gatsby wants to challenge the existing social order (Bechtel 120), which is doomed to fail: "Though admirable,

Gatsby's presumptuous and scandalous attempt to join Daisy's elite world is observed from the very beginning as illusory and futile" (Bechtel 125).

According to Nick, Gatsby's illusion consists of a colossal vitality (GG 97): "It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart" (GG 97). Like Frankenstein, Gatsby's over ambitious goal is accompanied by a craving desire and a total neglect of anything else including boundaries. Like Frankenstein, Gatsby is similarly fully absorbed in his task to the extent that there is nothing left but that object: "he had committed himself to the following of a grail" (GG 150). Thus, his tale arguably becomes a quest narrative or romance (Gizzo 82-83). "Gatsby's accomplishments are a credit to his energy, enthusiasm, and singlemindedness, his sheer determination at all costs to stem the flow of history's current" (Steinbrink 162). However, like Frankenstein, Gatsby's quest can be considered dubious. His quest for love involves crime and corruption and his wealth is related to these criminal doings (Brauer 54). In addition, Gatsby's romantic readiness is linked to an "overwhelming self-absorption" (GG 99) and various lies; he won Daisy under false pretences by making her believe in their shared social status (GG 150). Furthermore, like Frankenstein he is driven by "an instinct towards his future glory" (GG 100), which reinforces his ambition and stresses his self-serving motives. However, we must be aware of the fact that it is Nick who connects the want for glory with Gatsby's character.

Gatsby's illusion is embodied in the portrayal of his house (Long 260). As the novel progresses and Gatsby's faith has been met, Nick looks "at that huge incoherent failure of a house" (GG 183). Furthermore, his illusion can be captured in his dream itself. Daisy is the dream; however, she is barely a real woman (Bizzell 779). As mentioned above, she is intangible. Nick describes "an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house" (GG 8). Daisy's unreal qualities are ascribed to her floating in midair (Samuels 787) and her voice contributes to her human magic (GG 109). Daisy 'Fay' or fairy is an object with a special property that makes her "magical, promising and potentially dangerous" (Gizzo 83). In other words, the description of Daisy symbolizes the fact that Gatsby's dream is in illusion, which is underlined in Nick's account of Gatsby "watching over nothing" (GG 147). Similarly to Frankenstein, Gatsby's object of desire

becomes an object of disgust, at least on Nick's account. He seems to realize that Daisy and her world is the "foul dust [that] floated in the wake of [Gatsby's] dreams" (GG 2).

## Isolation and alienation

Like Frankenstein, Gatsby differs from other people in relation to the amount of belief and confidence in his dream. To an extent beyond comparison, "he adopts the myth of regeneration as the single sustaining principle of his existence" (Steinbrink 161). However, despite his efforts to be included in Daisy's world Gatsby remains a solitary outsider "and his bizarre estate at West Egg is as close as he will ever come to the established society of the Buchanans" (Long 262).

As is the case in Frankenstein, it can be claimed that Gatsby isolates himself purposely in relation to his mission. Thus, it might be argued that his isolation is similarly connected to his deeds. Aspiring for more, Gatsby runs away from home and distances himself from his parents (GG 175) since they are an obstacle to his goal; he cannot be associated with "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (GG 99) from Minnesota (Railton 139) if he is to reach his goal. That is why he strives to reach beyond his origins. Gatsby appears mysterious or indefinable in his attempt to disguise his origins as well as his dubious doings; the effect is arguably alienation. Gatsby construct his own world to the extent that it is solipsistic, which is why he rarely converses with people more than briefly (Magistrale and Dickerson 124). That is, Gatsby arguably keeps himself distanced to other people to disguise himself. On more than one occasion, Gatsby seems to disappear (GG 22, GG 86, GG 74).

There is a strong contrast between Gatsby's more than well-visited parties and his isolation: "A wafer of a moon was shining over Gatsby's house, making the night fine as before, and surviving the laughter and the sound of his still glowing garden. A sudden emptiness seemed to flow now from the windows and the great doors, endowing with complete isolation the figure of the host, who stood on the porch, his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell" (GG 56). This passage seems to emphasize Gatsby as a mythic hero whose greatness involves "a total isolation from the lives of ordinary men" (Long 275), which additionally explains his alienation. Despite being a generous host, it seems that his surroundings barely notice him. Nick observes Gatsby's party and notices that "no one swooned backward on Gatsby, and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder, and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link" (GG 51). Furthermore, nobody except Nick, Gatsby's father, and the man with the owl-eyes spectacles (GG 45) attends Gatsby's funeral (GG 176-177). "It is the only time that people are asked to be with Gatsby without

getting anything in return" (Lukens 45). The fact that practically no one attends Gatsby's funeral, might suggest that Gatsby is not significant or great in the eyes of the majority of his surroundings. That is, few people acknowledge his worth. Gatsby's alienation can be considered self-inflicted, however, it is also an indication of his ultimate exclusion. The utter dissociation between host and guests can be found in the fact that Nick describes him as standing alone (GG 50) in the middle of his party: "I wondered if the fact that he was not drinking helped to set him off from his quests, for it seemed to me that he grew more correct as the fraternal hilarity increased" (GG 50). This passage seems to suggest that Gatsby in his isolation is admirable. Nick's perspective of Gatsby is addressed further in the section on identity.

The following passage awkwardly portrays how Gatsby is considered inadequate and unworthy of the company of the East Egg crowd. He receives a dinner invitation from a woman; however, her husband disapproves: "[Gatsby] wanted to go and he didn't see that Mr Sloane had determined he shouldn't. … 'Come on,' said Mr Sloane to Tom, 'we're late. We've got to go.' And then to me: 'Tell him we couldn't wait, will you?' … they trotted quickly down the drive, disappearing under the August foliage just as Gatsby, with hat and light overcoat in hand, came out the front door" (GG 104-105). Like the monster, Gatsby is unable to join the East Egg world due to certain deficiencies. Some argue that Gatsby's appearance is to blame. Nick describes Gatsby's skin as tanned (GG 50) and his body as brown (GG 99) while he is associated with ethnic criminality (Will 136) through his business with Mr. Wolfshiem (GG 69). Hence, Gatsby can be considered a threat because he "represents the vanishing of whiteness" (Will 133). Like the monster, Gatsby can be read as a racial other, which is certainly an attempt made by Tom Buchanan with his comment on "intermarriage between black and white" (GG 130). However, this claim may be dismissed with Jordan's statement: "We're all white here" (GG 130). Rather, "the stain, the taint, the pollutant in Gatsby's blood is his working-class status, his humble origins" (Kirkby 154). Even though Gatsby has risen from poverty to wealth due to his dubious practices (Solomon 187), it is impossible for him to disguise his newly richness. Despite his acquired wealth and various material possessions that function to display his prosperity (Gizzo 71), his money is not inherited and thus based on ancestry. The people in East Egg maintain their superiority due to their old money system (Bechtel 120, Long 265). Nick observes, "I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with and absolute smirk on her lovely face, as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged" (GG 18). Hence, Daisy will never belong to Gatsby, only as a lover. "Despite Jay Gatsby's vigorous attempt to rise above his original class status and to

become a part of Daisy's elite world, his attempt results in disaster" (Bechtel 127). Nick notes, that between Gatsby and such people, there are "indiscernible barbed wire" (GG 149). In relation to the 'awkward' passage above, Gatsby politely says "'I'm delighted that you dropped in.' As though they cared!" (GG 102). Unlike Gatsby, Nick is aware of the fact that Gatsby is not material for their distinguished society. Hence, like the monster Gatsby can be considered a victim of man's prejudice, or rather the prejudice of East Egg. However, while the monster realizes he can only have a companion that resembles himself, Gatsby in contrast wants the one he cannot obtain. Like Frankenstein, he yearns for the unattainable.

## Identity struggles

Gatsby can be considered a self-created being (Day 168) or a self-made man (Bizzell 780): "The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (GG 99). In the process, his parents become invisible: "his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (GG 99). His "dreams depend on an explicit rejection of them" (Railton 139). With an unknown past, Gatsby appears to have come out of nowhere (Long 271), which results in the rumors that surround him, which further mystify him and blur his identity. Some believe he was a German spy (GG 44), some claim he is "nephew to Von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil" (GG 61), while others believe he once killed a man (GG 44). The rumour that he is a bootlegger (GG 61) turns out to be true, which will be addressed later. Note the irony in a bootlegger that does not drink. Similarly, Gatsby himself has made up a tale that serves to present him in a rosy light that does not hold, involving the description of his parents as wealthy and himself as an Oxford man: "He hurried the phrase 'educated at Oxford', or swallowed it, or choked on it, as though it had bothered him before" (GG 65). However, he convinces Nick of his lie by showing him a picture from Oxford: "Then it was all true" (GG 67) Nick exclaims. Only towards the end under Tom's inquiry, he admits that he is not exactly an Oxford man since he only went there (GG 129).

During the war, the cloudiness of Gatsby's identity due to his uniform enables him to win Daisy. Robert Long argues, "it is possible for him momentarily, in the social mobility which the war brings about, to pass as one of Daisy's own class" (264). Following the war, "he did what he thought necessary to become what he had let Daisy believe he was, and to ransom her back" (Steinbrink 161). Hence, in addition to a rejection of his origins, crime and commodities become means to define and bolster his identity (Gizzo 71) in order for him to resemble a proper suiter for

Daisy. However, his fragmented identity only furthers his aura of mystery. Like the monster, he is not identifiable; he is not comprehendible. Since it is argued that he is neither fully white, nor fully Jewish (Will 133) he is located in "the liminal space between categories, the space of indeterminacy" (Will 135). Consequently, Tom's judgement of Gatsby as a "Mr Nobody from Nowhere" (GG 130) can be considered an accurate observation. Gatsby's obscurity is further stressed with the obscene word written on his stairs (GG 183), which Nick erases without revealing to the reader its meaning. It can be considered fitting to elaborate on the indeterminacy of Gatsby's character with a word that cannot be read (Will 136). The man with the owl-eyed spectacles (GG 45) is a character that suspects Gatsby's imposture, believing his books to be cardboard imitations like Gatsby himself (Onderdonk 201, GG 46). However, he finds them to be real: "It fooled me (…) What thoroughness! What realism!" (GG 46). This passage shows how Gatsby's false identity is constructed to the extent that it becomes his real identity. Gatsby's identity making involves an alter ego; a fictional self (Beard 73-74) that stresses Gatsby's Platonic self-conception mentioned above. Jay Gatsby can be considered the alter ego of James Gatz (LaHurd 119). "James Gatz – that was really, or at least legally, his name" (GG 98). In this passage, Nick indicates that for Gatz there is only Gatsby left. "Jay Gatsby is the creation of James Gatz, a fictional identity or incognito which is at all times threatened by reality; yet in the end James Gatz comes to seem less real than Jay Gatsby" (Long 272). As he introduces himself as Jay Gatsby, "his ego and alter ego merge" (LaHurd 117). In other words, Gatsby's character can be claimed to be self-constructed to the extent that his identity is lost: he is a hollow man (Stone 128). Gatsby constructs a version of himself that completely differs from his true self in order to win Daisy. However, despite his hard work he does not succeed in the end; rather he arguably fits the portrayal of the Gothic protagonist that longs for an unattainable status. Like the monster who watches the society he deeply wants to join from a safe distance, Gatsby too stares at the green light across the bay (GG 22) that represents Daisy (Gizzo 78). Gatsby stretches his arm towards the light that is out of his reach, yet close at hand (GG 22).

The relationship between Nick and Gatsby is a relationship between the observer and the observed to which the Gothic pattern of enthrallment can be applied (Day 175). The observer is a passive voyeur whereas the observed embodies an active and aggressive masculine identity, which represents the quest hero (Day 175), that is Gatsby (Bechtel 123). Day notes, "the observer becomes the double of the man he observes, and the act of voyeurism becomes an act of self-definition, as the observer participates in the doomed quest of the hero from a safe distance" (175). Nick helps Gatsby set up a meeting in order for him to reunite with Daisy (GG 79, 82-83) and he becomes

deeply affected by Gatsby's quest, which I will return to. The observer's storytelling makes it difficult for him to distance himself from the observed and thus escape the enthrallment to the Other, which results in a single identity in the pair (Day 175-176). Nick and Gatsby have a similar predicament (Stone 130). Like Gatsby, Nick is driven to the East due to restlessness (Steinbrink 160, Stone 130), they both served in the war in the First Division (GG 47), and Nick experiences a disenchantment that is arguably found in Gatsby as well (Stone 130), which will be elaborated on later. Nick additionally resembles Gatsby due to his dubious conception of time (Steinbrink 160): He believes "life was beginning over again with the summer" (GG 4). According to Bruce Stone, "each character is condemned to chase the past, and doomed, in some sense, by a glimpse of something (nearly) 'commensurate to his capacity for wonder' …: for Gatsby, Daisy; for Nick, Gatsby" (130). In addition, Nick is surrounded by a feeling of loneliness; he feels isolated even among people (Gizzo 75) since "he lives an anonymous life structured by impersonal interactions" (Gizzo 73). It is likely that this assertion is connected to Nick's aversion towards the people of East Egg, which will be further elaborated on later. Hence, Nick can be considered an outsider (Gizzo 81) like Gatsby. In addition, the split personality that Gatsby embodies due to his transformation of self can similarly be claimed to be found in Nick's double role as participant and observer (Gizzo 79). The double perspective can be considered to the extent that Fitzgerald himself is both Nick and Gatsby (Bechtel 124): "Nick functions as a mediator between Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald's own alter ego Jay Gatsby. Carraway is the self-conscious decoy that emphasizes the "ethical discriminations" with which Fitzgerald is concerned; the proverbial doppelganger" (Bechtel 123). Hence, the double perspective that is found in *Frankenstein* can also be found in *The Great Gatsby*; however with slight differences.

The complex hero-villain that was accounted for in the analysis of *Frankenstein* can be considered well alive in Gatsby as well. Gatsby's heroic quest is similarly accompanied by corruption, as mentioned earlier. Gatsby becomes a dual figure as he is portrayed as both sympathetic and despicable (Brauer 67). "The description of vital energy … implies strength of character" (Berman 91):

> He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of
> movement that is so peculiar American – that comes, I suppose, with … the formless
> grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his
> punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was

always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand (GG
64).

Gatsby's exuberant imagination contributes to his heroic stature (Long 276) as well as his strong
passion regarding the past (Berman 86). Gatsby's attributes including "his youth, his beauty, his
faith in life, his capacity for wonder, his romantic commitment, his idealism; indeed, his very
capacity to dream" (McAdams 657), all contribute to his heroic portrayal. Furthermore, Gatsby
embodies "qualities of courtesy, thoughtfulness, and honor. … He has that nobility unknown to
West Egg [and] forgotten by East Egg" (Berman 88). Gatsby is a gentleman: a gentleman hero
(Berman 88) and a gentleman criminal (Berman 87). Tom reveals his bootlegging business (Lukens
45): "He and his Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold
grain alcohol over the counter. That's one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first
time I saw him, and wasn't far wrong" (GG 134). According to Stephen Brauer, "the "services" that
Gatsby and Wolfshiem provide their clients remain murky, but probably include bootlegging,
gambling, loansharking, and selling stolen bonds" (Brauer 55). When Gatsby stands in the darkness
outside Daisy's house, Nick narrates "Somehow, that seemed a despicable occupation. For all I
knew he was going to rob the house in a moment; I wouldn't have been surprised to see sinister
faces, the faces of 'Wolfshiem's people', behind him in the dark shrubbery" (GG 144). According
to Roger Pearson, "Gatsby's gospel of hedonism is reflected in his house, wild parties, clothing,
roadster, and particularly in his blatant wooing another man's wife" (Pearson 642). In other words,
Gatsby's quest for Daisy can be considered to be accompanied by his corruption:

> Nick traces [Gatsby's] transformation from a provincial idealist into an egotistical
> predator in scenes which show him as a youngster planning to attain wealth and social
> status while adhering to small town notions of virtue and chivalry, as an ambitious
> youth under the tutelage of Dan Cody, who educates him in ruthlessness, and as an
> associate of Meyer Wolfshiem, whose underworld activities help him amass the fortune
> needed to purchase his fabulous mansion (Bevilacqua 48).

The anti-hero tendencies in Gatsby may be linked to adolescence issues that are found in
Frankenstein as well. Gatsby's energy that arguably implies intensity and emotional commitment
(Berman 91-92) is also described as boyish restlessness (Long 269). In addition, Gatsby's

extraordinary gifts are accompanied by a naïve childlike romanticism (Onderdonk 197). He convinces himself that he can repeat the past, which arguably resembles the ignorance of a child and the inexperience of a youngster: "It might be said that there remained an aura of adolescence around Gatsby's life of illusion" (LaHurd 119). He invents "just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (GG 99). In other words, the dream when he was seventeen remains unchanged to the extent that "the fairy tale of adolescence becomes the sole motivation of manhood" (Magistrale and Dickerson 118). However, the "adolescent expectation had grown beyond the limits of what mature reason could expect" (LaHurd 119-120). Phillip Beard has suggested a link between the child and Gatsby: "the 'grandiose self' … is itself a mask for a 'ravenous infant, beset with a diffuse type of oral rage, which could annihilate subject and object, were it exposed' " (76). According to Beard, that infant is revealed when Nick describes Gatsby's "ambition to climb an imaginary ladder and drink 'the pap of life' from a kind of dream-breast on high" (Beard 76, GG 112). The passage suggests a child-like fantasy in Gatsby, which is emphasized in his capacity for wonder (GG 183). Furthermore, it is perhaps suitable to consider Gatsby immature as he is stripped from courage prior to his meeting with Daisy. Gatsby becomes alarmed as it is time for him to face Daisy, which resembles Frankenstein's anxiety facing his wedding night: "Gatsby, pale as death, with his hands plunged like weights in his pockets, was standing in a puddle of water glaring tragically into my eyes" (GG 86-87). Furthermore, like a shy child he is unable to be alone in the room with Daisy and he follows Nick wildly into the kitchen (GG 88). Gatsby's child-like behavior may be confirmed with Nick's impatient comment: "You're acting like a little boy" (GG 89). Gatsby's fear proves a strong contrast to his possessiveness towards Daisy; an aspect that once again resembles Frankenstein. However, this attitude may additionally be linked to a child's selfishness. When he met Daisy, Gatsby "took her because he had no real right to touch her hand" (GG 150) and after the war Gatsby similarly takes Daisy as an emotional hostage (Steinbrink 161). As has been mentioned, in contrast to Gatsby, Frankenstein's monster wants a female version of himself; he knows she must be of the same species in order for her to accept him. Such rationalization and humbleness is not to be found in Gatsby who strives beyond his own class and strongly believes himself able to win Daisy to the extent that she will leave Tom. Despite Gatsby's inferior fortune compared to Tom's enormous wealth (GG 6) and his being a "crazy fish" (GG 104) among her kind, Gatsby strives beyond his position. It can be argued that both Frankenstein and Gatsby are irrational beings compared to the monster.

Gatsby's ambivalent character is portrayed through the perspective of Nick who finds Gatsby both gorgeous (GG 2) and sinister (GG 65): "the attitude toward the hero is equivocal: none of the narrators truly embraces without question the image of the patriarch, and the masculine identity is shown over and over again to be self-destructive, even if gloriously so" (Day 176). Hence, the Gothic combination of fear and desire is represented in Nick's combination of amazement and moral disgust towards Gatsby (Day 175). Nick states, Gatsby "represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (GG 2) while on the same page claiming that Gatsby "turned out all right at the end" (GG 2). He additionally compliments Gatsby while stressing his disapproval of him: "'They're a rotten crowd,' … 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together.' I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end" (GG 155). In other words, Nick has an irreconcilable double vision (Dubose 81, Onderdonk 202). However, Nick's uncertainty may indicate the superiority of Gatsby's worth compared to his crime since Gatsby, as Nick notes himself towards the end, embodies a value and substance that seem to distance him from the rest. According to Day, in novels like *The Great Gatsby* the "observers … come to see them as greater than other men, and their stories become the observer's stories" (Day 176). Nick and Walton share the common admiration for their hero. Nick's double perspective of Gatsby must be acknowledged, however, like Walton Nick's narration similarly tends to blur Gatsby's errors (Gizzo 81) since he arguably judges him great in the end. Hence, Gatsby's flaws are downplayed; his magic, glamour, and noble character shadows "his relentless, single-minded ambition, his illegal activities, his attempts to 'steal' another man's wife" (Gizzo 81). In addition, Nick finds himself solitarily on Gatsby's side (GG 166): "I began to have a feeling of defiance, of scornful solidarity between Gatsby and me against them all" (GG 167). Nick "arrives at a sympathetic … portrayal of Gatsby" (Gizzo 81); he arguably approves of Gatsby's mentality and enterprise, ending his narrative with the following words: "So we beat on, boats against the current, born back ceaselessly into the past" (GG 184). Nick's unreliability is an area of discussion; some have pointed to the various contradictions in his narration whereas others consider him a provider of a thoroughly reliable guidance (Onderdonk 195). It can be argued that it is through Nick that Gatsby's character unfolds and his 'true' character is divulged. However, according to Stone, "we see evidence of Nick mythologizing Gatsby, distorting and enlarging his character, rather than giving readers a clear-eyed account of his tale (125). The darkness in Gatsby is disguised through Nick's sentimental portrayal (Gizzo 81). Nevertheless, Todd Onderdonk claims that Nick embodies an ideal impartiality since he is

speculative and able both to criticize and appreciate the traits in the characters he describes (196). In other words, his contradictions arguable make him reliable. Nick himself states, "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (GG 60). However, we must take into consideration that he thinks highly of himself. Furthermore, since Nick is the only perspective in the novel, we must be critical of him since there is no counterpoint to his narration and because Nick's reading of Gatsby's mind can be considered merely an attempt.

Gatsby like Frankenstein is arguably left unaware of his own ill doings. He never considers his dubious deeds that function as corrupt means to his dreamy end: "his activities that by other standards would be illegal or sinful are for Gatsby outside the realm of traditional moral judgments. He did only what was intended to make things fine and beautiful" (LaHurd 119). Like Frankenstein, it can be claimed that Gatsby considers his intentions good since he does not acknowledge his own flaws. For example, he offers Nick a job inside his circle (GG 83-84), which emphasizes his misperception regarding his doings. Furthermore, even though he intentionally lies to Daisy, he is not remorseful: "he had deliberately given Daisy a sense of security; he let her believe that he was a person from much the same strata as herself – that he was fully able to take care of her. As a matter of fact, he had no such facilities – he had no comfortable family standing behind him … *But he didn't despise himself*" (GG 150, emphasis added). At the expense of repeating myself, Gatsby is a criminal: a bootlegger and possible swindler (Berman 83). It seems that the fulfillment of Gatsby's dream exceeds the recognition of its corruption. However, the above passage must be considered in the light of Daisy's similar corruption; one might suggest that five years later she takes Gatsby as a lover under false pretenses, thus making him believe in the possibility of her leaving Tom.

Despite Gatsby's assumption that his dream is obtainable, an element of doubt regarding that dream remains, like in Frankenstein. As Gatsby waits for Daisy to call him, Nick notes, "I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared. If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream" (GG 163). Furthermore, it is perhaps likely that once the dream is fulfilled the illusion of that dream becomes clear, as is the case in Frankenstein. According to Suzanne Gizzo, the intimacy between Gatsby and Daisy destroys his fantasy since its reality is revealed (Gizzo 86): "Once an object is possessed, its magical qualities begin to diminish" (Gizzo 85), which is exemplified in the following passage:

Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he just said.
Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now
vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it
had seemed very near to her, almost touching her … Now it was again a green light on a
dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one (GG 94).

The quote demonstrates Gatsby's doubt (GG 97). As Daisy stands next to Gatsby, she loses the
enchantment of distance (Samuels 790). **"**Gatsby's dream of Daisy is perfect only until the tangible
Daisy reappears; then he begins to sense disappointment" (Steinbrink 167). However Gatsby's
doubts are ambivalent. Like Frankenstein, it is possible that Gatsby dies without enlightenment
(Dilworth 56): "He is not given time to contemplate his fall or to learn very much from it; no new
faith, not even despair, establishes itself before he is murdered" (Steinbrink 166). Hence, it is
possible that he until the end remains a believer in his limitless possibilities and his "incorruptible
dream" (GG 156). Hence, despite his doubts it is difficult to determine whether his hope is entirely
lost.

## Overreaching and downfall: hubris and nemesis

Towards the end of *The Great Gatsby*, the atmosphere seems to be transformed, which might
suggest a foreshadowing of Gatsby's downfall. Gatsby's house is portrayed in a manner that
resembles Gatsby's shattered illusion with its disorder and incoherence (Long 226):

His house had never seemed so enormous to me as it did that night when we hunted
through the great rooms for cigarettes. We pushed aside curtains that were like
pavilions, and felt over innumerable feet of dark wall for electric light switches – once I
tumbled with a sort of splash upon the keys of a ghostly piano. There was an
inexplicable amount of dust everywhere, and the rooms were musty, as though they
hadn't been aired for many days. I found the humidor on an unfamiliar table, with two
stale, dry cigarettes inside. Throwing open the french windows of the drawing-room, we
sat smoking out into the darkness (GG 148).

This description can be considered quite uncanny and sinister in contrast to the light, lively, colorful
parties the house tends to hold. It is in the wake of Nick's sudden need to warn Gatsby of something

(GG 148) this description takes place. Hence, Nick perhaps senses a coming nemesis, a prediction of Gatsby's death, which disrupts his sleep: "I tossed half-sick between grotesque reality and savage, frightening dreams" (GG 148). Frankenstein's nightmare similarly occurs after he exhaustedly turns to sleep after his grotesque creation is completed (F 50-51); when he wakes up the reality of his nightmare is let loose.

   Gatsby's downfall can be explained in relation to his violation of social boundaries in a world in which wealth is measured in terms of origin and ancestry (Bechtel 127-128, Gizzo 88). "Fitzgerald divides his characters' economic worlds with the 'valley of ashes' …, symbolically reiterating their social heterogeneity and effectively sealing Gatsby from his goal" (Bechtel 120). In order to fully win Daisy, Gatsby wants her to leave Tom. He tells her, "Just tell him the truth – that you never loved him – and it's all wiped out forever" (GG 132). However, Daisy cannot claim that she never loved Tom: "Gatsby's eyes opened and closed. 'You loved me *too*?' he repeated" (GG 133). Hence, one might indicate that Gatsby's downfall partly result from the fact that Daisy's love for him is secondary. Furthermore, once Tom uncovers Gatsby's crime his attempts at denying fail, for "with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up, and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away, trying to touch what was no longer tangible, struggling unhappily, undespairingly, toward that lost voice across the room" (GG 135). The passage suggests that Gatsby's dream is shattered. Gatsby's downfall can be considered in relation to his involvement with the Buchanans who arguably refuse to accept him and additionally destroy him. Daisy lets Gatsby take the blame for her running down of Myrtle in his car (GG 145) and Tom points out Gatsby as the owner of the car to revengeful Wilson (GG 181), which result in Gatsby's death. Tom states: "What if I did tell him? That fellow had it coming to him" (GG 181). It seems Nick judges Gatsby great since the amorality of Tom and Daisy far exceed Gatsby's crimes.

   Even though Gatsby's death can be related to the Buchanans, Gatsby's downfall might also be linked to his dubious character traits. According to Beard, narcissism can be considered "an enclosed, consumerist personality obsessed with its own unachievable perfection" (76). Gatsby's narcissist traits are diagnosed by Nick in the following statement (Beard 76): "he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself … that had gone into loving Daisy" (GG 111). Beard considers this passage narcissistic since Gatsby considers himself able to win Daisy; it is possible that he genuinely believes that he is good enough for her, so to speak. Hence, Gatsby's illusion can be considered in relation to narcissism. Furthermore, the description of the masculine archetype employed in the *Frankenstein* analysis can be used to describe Gatsby as well. In order to clarify

this assumption the quote will be inserted once again: "the masculine archetype embodies selfish, egocentric impulses, often manifested as a desire to become godlike, or even to become God. Rooted in this identity is the impulse to impose one's will upon the world and other people and to do so by breaking moral and social laws; the masculine archetype can be satisfied only with power that is illegitimate" (Day 76). Presumably driven by self-interests, Gatsby clearly attempts to impose his will on others and the world since he believes himself able to control how things turn out. As mentioned above, he certainly breaks social laws and can additionally be considered morally corrupt due to his crime and his intense dishonesty. Gatsby's "existence is founded on a lie, a delusion, and he terms this monstrous lie 'God's truth'" (Pearson 640). In other words, Gatsby swears to God while lying (GG 65). Hence, like Frankenstein and the gothic masculine archetype, Gatsby's perception of higher powers is problematic. Nick describes Gatsby as "a son of God" (GG 99). Furthermore, according to Nick Gatsby realizes that once he kissed Daisy "his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (GG 122). Nick's tendency to perceive Gatsby as godlike is ascribed to Gatsby's "capacity for self-making and for self-definition" (Gizzo 78). In other words, Gatsby's unaided imagination is portrayed in a manner that makes it resemble the autonomy of God (Bizzell 781). In this regard, I will return to Gatsby's disturbing conception of time and his ominous idea of his own powers in that regard. He believes himself able to repeat the past: Nick tells Gatsby "'You can't repeat the past.' Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!' He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. 'I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,' he said, nodding determinedly. 'She'll see.'" (GG 111). This passage demonstrates Gatsby's passionate denial of human limitations (Samuels 787) since he is certain of "the human capacity for renewal" (Steinbrink 165). He comes to believe himself omniscient – above the restrictions of society and morality (Pearson 642). His presumption extends to a belief that he can even transcend the natural boundaries placed upon human beings. R. Stallman asks, "What more colossal hubris can 'a son of God' commit than to tinker with the temporal order of the universe!" (4). Gatsby has constructed an image of Daisy that transcends time (Stone 125). Hence, in order to reach his goal Gatsby must destroy time. A broken clock symbolizes the passing of time in the novel (Magistrale and Dickerson 118). Hence, Gatsby's grotesque attempt to control time is closely linked to this aforementioned clock: "His head leaned back so far that it rested against the face of a defunct mantelpiece clock, and from this position his distraught eyes stared down at Daisy, who was sitting, frightened but graceful, on the edge of a stiff chair" (GG 87). This description additionally portrays the intensity of

his dream. In the following quote, emphasis is on the vulnerability and delusion of his dream since it trembles (Magistrale and Dickerson 123): "the clock took this moment to tilt dangerously at the pressure of his head, whereupon he turned and caught it with trembling fingers, and set it back in place" (GG 87). This passage demonstrates Gatsby's dubious attempt to seize power over something, which is out of his hands. Gatsby's quest is doomed to fail because hubris is followed by nemesis. "Caught in adolescent solipsism, Gatsby had failed to realize that all reality cannot be made to bow to one man's plan" (LaHurd 120).

Frankenstein's death can be considered self-inflicted and his chase after the monster might indicate a hunting down of himself. In *The Great Gatsby*, self-invention can similarly be considered self-destruction. According to Gizzo, "to invent as self requires the destruction of the self that was before"; hence, "Jimmi Gatz is in a sense killed by Gatsby" (Gizzo 81). Hence, Gatsby's death can be considered in relation to his overreaching, his identity making, and Tom and Daisy's carelessness (GG 182) that ultimately kills Gatsby (Bechtel 125).


## A GOTHIC PROTAGONIST?

This section is to provide a discussion of whether Gatsby can be considered a Gothic protagonist. The four subsections within the two analyses above suggest that the novels are comparable to some extent; in other words, the completed analyses confirm the novels' thematic parallels. They have the following themes in common: limitless ambition and grotesque illusion, isolation and alienation, identity struggles, and overreaching and downfall, as have been demonstrated in the above analyses. The analysis of *The Great Gatsby* involved Frankenstein as a frame; thus, it largely functioned as a comparative analysis. The similarities between the two novels will be further elaborated on in this section, in order to discuss the possible reading of Gatsby as Gothic. Differences between the novels will be accounted for as well.

Frankenstein and Gatsby can be considered overreachers due to their utopian conceptions of life and their will to transcend their boundaries, which both demonstrate their grotesque illusions and limitless ambitions. Frankenstein has been described as "a secretly selfish utopian idealist" (Sherwin 895); a notion that arguably applies to Gatsby as well. "To pursue transcendent goals is to be, like Victor Frankenstein, ensnared in exactly what one wishes to transcend" (Day 71). It can be indicated, that both Frankenstein and Gatsby become slaves of their dreams in the sense that they cannot escape them. Frankenstein must revenge the monster's doings

and thus follows him until he exhaustedly dies, whereas Gatsby is unable let go of Daisy and the slight of hope left for them to be together. However, it can be argued that both Frankenstein and Gatsby eventually die as inferior beings compared to their dreams. The monster and Daisy can be considered superior beings; the monster in strength, Daisy in status. In addition, both Frankenstein and Gatsby can be considered characters with unseeing eyes; they do not recognize their own delusions or faults. However, both Walton and Nick portray their heroes as notable and outstanding characters to the extent that their moral superiority far exceed that of the monster and Daisy. Perhaps Gatsby in particular embodies heroic attributes in his quest for Daisy, which is an aspect I will return to. At any rate, it seems that *The Great Gatsby* can be considered a love story, which is arguably not the case in *Frankenstein*. Generally, the Gothic protagonist is not capable of love (Day 98). If Day's claim is valid, Gatsby seems to deviate from the Gothic in this respect for in terms of his love for Daisy it can be claimed that Gatsby remains loyal to the end.

In their ambitious efforts to fulfill their dreams of success, both Frankenstein and Gatsby's identities become entangled in their quest. Frankenstein believes his future glory is linked to his role as creator, whereas Gatsby's attempt to win the golden girl involves the suppression of his true identity. Gothic protagonists live according to their own will, and thus become self-created men, which is a description that certainly fits Gatsby (Day 167). In the process, both Frankenstein and Gatsby exclude themselves from their surroundings and origins. Day states, "both genres [Modernism and Gothicism] are founded on a feeling of isolation; in each the protagonists are alone, cut off from a communal reality that might offer support for individual identity (Victor Frankenstein is modern in part because he breaks away from his family and works in isolation)" (167). The isolation reinforces the breakdown of identity and self and the doubled and divided Gothic characters resemble Gatsby who appears to be one thing but is another (Day 168). Hence, severe issues of identity are presented in both novels and perhaps serve as a crucial link between the protagonists: "Fitzgerald's most splendid creation, Jay Gatsby, has been described as a Gothic protagonist: an isolated, tortured soul (à la Victor Frankenstein) unable to reconcile his playboy and farm boy personas" (Lee 137). Both novels focus on outcasts. According to Paul Cantor, the monster's "fall is his fatal attraction to civil society; and the attempts to join the ranks of social men leads to his misery" (120). The same can be considered the case with Gatsby; he similarly yearns to become a member of a distinct society that refuses to accept him. It is, however, unclear whether Gatsby fully comprehends his exclusion.

In terms of narrative structure, both novels are framed by an outsider who becomes significant in terms of the telling of the story. Both Walton and Nick leave their homes behind in the want for something different, and they both return home in the end. In addition, they can both be considered the double of their 'hero'. Walton and Nick both take the responsibility as narrators of the tales. Walton seeks to record Frankenstein's narrative and considers it a manuscript (F 22). Nick similarly refers to "this book" (GG 2) and wants to tell the reader what happened (GG 157). Hence, the subjectivity of reality is portrayed through their perspectives. However, the narrative structure in the two novels differs since *Frankenstein* is constructed out of several narratives, while Gatsby is told from the perspective of Nick as the sole point of view. In other words, in *Frankenstein* the reader is presented with several stances on the situation, getting the point of view of both Frankenstein, the monster, and Walpole. That is, the plot expands the reader's assessment of the novel as the narrative voices change in the different chapters, and the reader becomes somewhat enlightened in that grand overview. However, Nick's narrative is constructed out of his developing assessment of Gatsby while the voice of the protagonist is left out. It could be argued that the aura of mystery that surrounds Gatsby is enhanced with Fitzgerald's dissociation from the Modernist tendency of character interiority and thus subject position in the protagonist, which is instead placed with the outsider Nick that stresses the distance between the reader and Gatsby (Bechtel 123). According to Day, Nick's fragmented narrative structure resembles the enfolded stories in Frankenstein; both novels dissociate themselves from narrative rules (Day 168). It could be argued that Nick's narration is fragmented and shifting since he struggles to comprehend Gatsby. In other words, it is perhaps difficult for the reader to fully grasp Gatsby because it is hard for Nick to comprehend Gatsby. With Gatsby's perspective left out, the reader must rely on Nick. That is one of the reasons why Nick been considered unreliable; a tendency found in the gothic as well, which is exemplified in Walton narrative. Nevertheless, Nick's narration has been said to be quite nuanced due to his shifting attitudes. To some extent, Walton is nuanced as well; he sympathizes with the monster unlike anyone else in the novel due to his unbiased ability to listen to the tales of others: "the dying request of my friend, in destroying his enemy, [was] now suspended by a mixture of curiosity and compassion" (F 226). Like Nick, he pities the outcast. However, Walton's account of Frankenstein is extremely biased; he glorifies Frankenstein. Even though Nick's perspective may be considered more nuanced and reflective, both narrators can be said to express admiration towards their 'heroes' and they both judge them great despite their flaws. In other words, the ambivalence of the hero-villain is represented in the accounts of both frame narrators who tend to accentuate the

heroic side. Hence, both Walton and Nick contribute to the ambiguous portrayal of Frankenstein and Gatsby respectively. The narrators' descriptions of the protagonists in the following quotes seem to have certain parallels. Consider Walton's portrayal of Frankenstein: "I see his thin hand raised in animation, while the lineaments of his face are irradiated by the soul within" (F 22) in relation to Nick's account of Gatsby: "he stretched out his arm toward the dark water in a curious way, and, far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling" (GG 22). Both descriptions can be argued to demonstrate a sense of ardour and enthusiasm in the protagonists, which is emphasized with the position of their hands.

The question of whether Gatsby is a Gothic protagonist must be considered in relation to the striking fact that the majority of sources do not consider him as such. That is, Gatsby is generally portrayed as something else. It is generally accepted that Gatsby represents the American Dream (Bechtel 124). The presence of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* may be considered a matter of course with an individual who succeeds in material success. As a land of opportunity the American Dream is generally "the belief that every man, whatever his origins, may pursue and attain his goals, be they political, monetary, or social" (Pearson 638). However, the attention to the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* is particularly connected to either its shortcoming or its corruption (Barbarese cxxiv, Gizzo 92, Samuels 787, Rohrkemper 158, Pearson 639-640, Loeffelholz 2148, Kirkby 160, Steinbrink 160, Onderdonk 205, Lukens 44). The American dream in *The Great Gatsby* is linked to Daisy as Gatsby's ultimate goal (Pearson 642); a goal that proves to be unachievable. The rise of the Gothic in the United States has been associated with the American Dream: "the Gothic, it is frequently reasoned, embodies and gives voice to the dark nightmare that is the underside of 'the American Dream' "(Savoy 167). This realization is too simplistic and reductive, but it "reveals the limitations of American faith in social and material progress" (Savoy 167). The corruption of the American Dream can be considered in relation to the fact that Gatsby's success is built on criminal activities and particularly the realization that money is not sufficient to transcend the social orders: "getting rich is easier than being accepted" (Berman 80). It can be argued that "Daisy belongs to a corrupt society, Gatsby corrupts himself in the quest for her, and above all, the rich have no intention of sharing their privileges" (Loeffelholz 2147). In other words, *The Great Gatsby* encapsulates American issues involving false relationships in a material world in which success overrules social responsibility (Berman 83). Even though a link between the American Dream and the Gothic can be considered too simplistic, it must be acknowledged that such a link may explain the darker strains in the novel. Despite Gatsby's striving

ambitions, the American Dream remains unfulfilled. Instead, the American Dream turns out to be a schizoid nightmare (Gizzo 81). In other words, "Fitzgerald's unique expression of the American dream lacks the optimism, the sense of fulfillment, so evident in the expressions of his predecessors" (Pearson 638), which might suggest the possibility of Fitzgerald's Gothic influence.

           If the limitless possibilities in the Romantic period resemble the aspect of limitless possibilities in the notion of the American dream, in *The Great Gatsby* this idealism is associated with destruction as is similarly the case in the Gothic. In *The Great Gatsby*, Romantic desire is framed as simultaneously seminal and fatal (Onderdonk 203). In other words, Romantic idealism can be considered a source of destruction in both novels; hence, focus is on the limits of such unrestrained commitment. Gatsby's fatal attempt to repeat the past bears a resemblance to the nightmare of Romantic idealism in Frankenstein's visionary dreams of remaking man. Hence, both Shelley and Fitzgerald's novels can be claimed to function as a critique. It can be argued that Fitzgerald's link to Gothicism is particularly found in the element of satire, which will be exemplified later in the elaboration on 'the ridiculous' character. Fitzgerald captures the moral failure of the Jazz Age as a savage and bitter satire (Štrba 1). "Being the witness of this tragic discrepancy himself, Francis Scott Fitzgerald mastered to capture the sense of romantic possibility being clashed and smashed by '…the rapacity that fuelled the nation's expansion, destroying the gifts of nature in process' "(Štrba 1). Through the monster's experiences, *Frankenstein* can be considered "a telling commentary on a society that has lost touch with its origins and thus lost its ability to distinguish true humanity from the veneer of civilization" (Cantor 120). The portrayal of Gatsby as more noble and worthy compared to the Buchanans, seems to correspond with the monster's tale; only Nick seems to acknowledge Gatsby's worth. In *Frankenstein,* Shelley "expresses some serious misgivings about idealism, solipsism, and other typical Romantic poses by illustrating the ambivalence of Romantic assumptions and attitudes" (Goetsch 95). However, in *The Great Gatsby* Fitzgerald's critique is arguably not directed at Gatsby's romantic readiness; rather it is aimed at the unreal material world in which characters like Gatsby are excluded by those of inherited wealth. Fitzgerald himself faced such exclusion and never managed to forgive the rich for being rich (McAdams 656). While "Tom and Daisy's spiritual corruption denies the American soul, … Gatsby's idealism affirms it" (657 McAdams). In other words, "Nick's [or Fitzgerald's] romanticization of Gatsby allows him to believe in purposeful, redemptive action that staves off the existential emptiness and fundamental incoherence of modern life" (Gizzo 81). The Romance quest pattern is found in *The Great Gatsby* (Day 167) and the quest hero is naturally represented in

Gatsby's character (Bechtel 123). "One need only consider Jay Gatsby to understand the transcendental set of *human* values—life, love, liberty, hope, and joy—residing at Fitzgerald's aesthetic core" (Lee 128). For Gatsby, reality is secondary to the dream and the ambitious hope is what drives him on towards his grail, Daisy, despite obstacles. In contrast to the novel's other characters, Gatsby arguably searches for something grander than materialism, which gives him a heightened sense of value, which is stressed by Nick in his acknowledgement of Gatsby's worth. Furthermore, Gatsby's unwillingness to let go of his dream despite possible doubts is accentuated in Nick's portrayal of Gatsby's persistence like a boat against the current that beats on (GG 184). According to Jeffrey Steinbrink, "Gatsby is to be admired for the scope of his vision and the sincerity with which he devotes himself to its realization" (166). It could be argued then that Gatsby is Romantic to the extent that his confidence in his own ability to conquer the waves and even time resembles Wordsworth's level of faith in the poet's powerful imagination. The amount of belief that Gatsby holds contrasts the Modernist conception of the world since it can be considered Romantic. The Gothic enters the scene when the Romantic thoughts and feelings are made specific and they turn out to be ridiculous and dangerous. According to Beard, Fitzgerald's romantic lightness is accompanied by darker strains (72), which is stressed with Gatsby's downfall.

Gatsby and Frankenstein both seem to have doubts regarding their dreams once they become tangible. In other words, both characters becomes disillusioned, which arguably make them ridiculous due to the assumption that they should have known better, so to speak. In Frankenstein's case, the dream of what can be achieved scientifically becomes a nightmare in the form of a monster. Frankenstein exclaims, "now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (F50). This passage to some extent reflects the transformation of Gatsby's perception of the green light as he holds Daisy; from being an intangible reverie of Daisy to being a palpable green light on a dock (GG 94). In other words, Gatsby might be struck by a glimpse of the reality of his dream; that Daisy is golden and nothing more. The ridiculous character that is often found in the Gothic, applies to Frankenstein as well as Gatsby. Both characters embody ludicrous traits and their delusions seem to stress their obtuseness. Frankenstein is weak; particularly in critical moments he is struck by feebleness (Day 99). Furthermore, he fails to understand that the monster's threat is directed at Elizabeth despite the fact that he just destroyed the female monster (Day 99), which stages the monster's obvious revenge: to kill Frankenstein's companion. Similarly, it seems Gatsby completely fails to realize that he is considered an outcast. Their ultimate dull-wittedness is portrayed in their firm belief in their own

impossible capabilities; creating a man by hand and repeating the past; becoming a creator and winning Daisy.

> The male protagonists of the gothic fantasy transform the heroic romance archetype and the Faustian tragic hero into an essentially pathetic character, self-blinded and duplicitous, a monstrous parody of the identity he attempts to assert, which is really no identity at all. They become their own victims in pursuit of masculine selfhood, and this renders them, not heroic, but absurd. Strikingly, though, they retain their capacity to generate fear (Day 102).

Hence, Gatsby and Frankenstein's grotesque illusions and failures can be considered tragicomic. However, Gatsby's ability to generate fear is arguably questionable. The mystery that surrounds him involves disturbing rumors and a sinister atmosphere. To begin with, Nick wonders "if there wasn't something a little sinister about him, after all" (GG 65). However, even as a criminal it can be argued that Gatsby fails to exude horror due to his sympathetic traits. Furthermore, his double does not happen to be a monster[16]. If a monster is present in Gatsby, then it is arguably found in the monstrosity of the Buchanans. Despite Gatsby's dubious and amoral activities, he seems to possess an innocence that is nowhere present in Daisy and Tom: "though a 'criminal,' he lacks utterly their taste for destruction" (Samuels 787). Gatsby even winces as Nick tells him that Myrtle was ripped open as Daisy struck her with his car (GG 145). On the other hand, Daisy's impulse was to run Myrtle over rather than steering towards the oncoming car (GG 145). Furthermore, perhaps it would be true to argue that Daisy is like a fatal siren deceiving Gatsby (Onderdonk 200, Antonelli 69) and luring him into an existential crisis and death, even. On the contrary, Nick comes to realize that the East Egg embodies "a quality of distortion" (GG 179). Like Frankenstein's monster is an object of disgust due to his appearance, the immoral doings of Tom and Daisy make Nick squeamish (GG 182). Consider the following quote: "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (GG 182). Perhaps it can be claimed that this passage describing Tom and Daisy makes them resemble the ferocity and gold fever of a dragon. In other words, this quote might link them to an actual medieval monster, which matches the medieval quest hero in Gatsby. However, one might suggest that

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[16] At least it has not been claimed in this thesis, but further study might search out other doubles in the novel.

Gatsby fails to win the non-existent princess and is rather killed by the dragon. The Gothic rejected the quest hero because of the assumption that such a figure was inadequate for contemporary culture (Day 171). It seems that *The Great Gatsby* suggests the same. Despite the Modernist revival of the quest hero, "it seems that modernist heroes are most compelling when, like the gothic protagonists, they express ironically their own irrelevance and failure" (Day 171).

Day relates the gothic fantasy and the modernist movement in their common notion of the wasteland (169). The ultimate *wasteland* in Frankenstein is the arctic desert in which both Frankenstein and the monster are seemingly destroyed (F 225, 230). "Nick Carraway describes the world to which Gatsby awakens after he finally loses Daisy as 'material without being real', and that description fits the chaotic horror of the gothic world" (Day 169). It is a world in which "poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about …" (GG 163). In other words, Gatsby can be considered to be surrounded by ghostly people who like himself live in a dream that sustains itself due to its delusion (Antonelli 72, LaHurd 120). *The Great Gatsby* can be considered in relation to the notion of the uncanny that is frequently employed in the description of the Gothic. Fitzgerald's symbolical style is perhaps in itself uncanny when phrases such as the above are used to describe the unreal material world. In particular the obscene word functions as a contrast to the presentable " 'in its determined violation of established norms, its eagerness to proclaim from beyond the acceptable, its appeal to the uncanny' "(Will 127). The unreality of reality that Nick employs as a phrase encapsulating Gatsby's vision might be said to resemble the Romantics' wish to shed light on the unreason in reason. Shelley emphasizes the tendency in *Frankenstein* with a monster coming to life in 'the real world'. However, the gothic distances such horrors from the reader by locating the story in a premodern setting. That is, in a sense the 'horrors' or the tragedy of Gatsby is much closer to the reader, since the story in a sense is very real with a much more comprehensible setting; the Roaring Twenties. "Both (Gothicism and Modernism) create a world apart from conventional reality, liberated from conventional ideals and restrictions. But where the gothic vision is parodic, the modernist uses gothic materials as the basis of a new mythology, as a vision of what reality is actually like" (Day 169). One might indicate that what is unreal and diffused in *The Great Gatsby* is Gatsby's disturbed idea of the world. That is, the world is more pessimistic, perhaps disturbing or grotesque, than the ever-positive Gatsby believes it to be. It can be argued that what ultimately unites Frankenstein and Gatsby is their unattainable visions that results in overreaching. "Frankenstein wishes that human beings could create life with their minds alone. He is most fundamentally a Romantic in his faith in the power of the imagination to shape a

world in accord with man's dreams and visions, although ironically his attempts to realize his dreams only draws him deeper and deeper into contact with the corrupt material world he is seeking to avoid" (Cantor 114). This passage describing Frankenstein's situation seems to capture both characters; it is a description that arguably fits Gatsby's character as well, which stresses the likeness between the two. Frankenstein's confrontation with the corrupt material world mirrors Gatsby's encounter with the unreal material world.

It has been demonstrated in the above that Gatsby can be considered a complex character. Some aspects can be said to combine Modernism and Gothicism, as Day has suggested. This claim would support Gatsby as Gothic, however, the position of the novel within the Modernist period must be looked upon critically. *The Great Gatsby* is a classic, but not necessarily a classic that is associated with Modernism. It might be argued that if Fitzgerald is not fully modernist, then there is room for him to be something else. Gatsby's heroic idealism seems to indicate Gatsby's Romantic traits. These traits, however, are combined with overreaching and destruction that is intensified in the gothic. According to Derek Lee, there are two aspects in Fitzgerald: there is "the Romantic Fitzgerald we have always admired for his inimitable prose, and the Gothic Fitzgerald lurking close behind, always cast in shadow—not because he was hiding, but because we refused to see him" (138). Hence, Lee suggests a Gothic reading of Gatsby since he claims to detect "a clear Gothic streak spanning the length of Fitzgerald's career, from his short fiction to his long fiction and from his least prestigious ghost stories to his most respected novels" (137). However, once again it must be noted that such claims are few; but they exist nevertheless.

The Great Gatsby can be considered a social comment in which Gatsby serves as a victim of the discriminating behaviour of the rich. The victim and the agent of the falsity and nightmare of the American Dream. A Romantic idealist. This thesis suggests the possibility of a reading of Gatsby as a Gothic protagonist due to the demonstration of several thematic parallels between Gatsby and Frankenstein, including immense overreaching and destructive downfall. It could be argued that the novel's darker strains cannot be ignored. Hence, this thesis has demonstrated how one work may offer new perspectives on another by the establishment of connections between the two.

# CONCLUSION

With the aim to compare *Frankenstein* and *The Great Gatsby*, this thesis set out to determine whether Gatsby can be considered a gothic protagonist. According to Day, parallels between Gothicism and Modernism can be traced, which suggest the possibility of such a reading. As has been pointed out during the thesis, these parallels include the dissociation from conventional narrative procedures, the element of isolation, the notion of the wasteland, self-creation and self-destruction, the failure of the hero, and the breakdown of objectivity. Despite the similarities, the general differences between the distinct literary periods must be noted. In addition, as has been mentioned Fitzgerald's undecided position within Modernism must be acknowledged in relation to Day's claims; however, his unresolved role within the movement might just enable a reading of Gatsby as gothic. The analyses have shown that the gothic novel and the American classic seem to have the following thematic elements in common: limitless ambition and grotesque illusion, isolation and alienation, identity struggles, and overreaching and downfall: hubris and nemesis. Frankenstein and Gatsby both strive for their goals beyond reason due to their large aspirations and lofty, limitless ambitions. In the process, they both face isolation and alienation. The monster's exclusion particularly resembles Gatsby's rejection by the old-money society. In both novels, characters mirror each other to the extent that the notion of self becomes blurred, lost even. … Eventually, both Gatsby and Frankenstein die because of their immense overreaching beyond their position. Hence, their destruction can be considered self-inflicted. Furthermore, both can be claimed to commit hubris and thus suffer from nemesis. In sum, the utopian conceptions of their missions and their self-absorbed tendencies make them transcend their human boundaries, which have fatal consequences. Hence, these findings suggest that it is possible to read *The Great Gatsby* in relation to *Frankenstein*. The question then follows, is Gatsby a gothic protagonist? *The Great Gatsby* is a product of the Modernist period. Despite the fact that Fitzgerald is not fully Modernist, he does not necessarily deviate from the movement to the extent that Modernism is nowhere to be found in his works. However, they arguably do not dominate. One might indicate that Fitzgerald's anomalous role is exemplified in his portrayal of Gatsby as a sentimentalist. Gatsby's unrestricted belief in his own possibilities arguably makes him a Romantic idealist; it is exactly this idealism that can be argued to make him enter the gothic world of enthrallment and destruction. However, it must be noted that the study is limited with few critics to support this claim. Nevertheless, despite the important and striking fact that Gatsby is generally not considered in relation to the gothic, this thesis has suggested that a reading of Gatsby as Gothic is at least worthy of mention. The thesis has

demonstrated how one novel may offer new perspectives on another; how gothic traits seem to moderately subsist in a more recent novel.

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis, "Fatal Ambitions: The Overreacher in *Frankenstein* and *The Great Gatsby*", has attempted to throw new light on one novel by investigating it in relation to another. As the title indicates, the novels are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). The thesis statement is as follows: Can Jay Gatsby be considered a gothic protagonist? In order to examine the thesis statement the employed method is literary analysis and interpretation. The analysis of *Frankenstein* serves as a frame for the the following analysis of *The Great Gatsby* in order to approach the study of Gatsby as Gothic. Prior to the analyses a description of the novel's respective literary periods will be given in order to provide a contextualization. Fitzgerald's unsettled position within Modernism is acnknowledged and it can be argued that his debatable role perhaps enables an unconventional reading of Gatsby. It seems that certain similarities between Romanticism and Modernism <span style="color:red">as distinct periods</span> can be found: William Patrick Day argues that Gothicism and Modernism are somewhat comparable for example in terms of dissociation from narrative rules, isolation in characters, the breakdown of objectivity and self, and the hero's failure. Hence, Day's claims are considered and included. However, the overall aim of this thesis remains the analysis of *The Great Gatsby* in relation to *Frankenstein* in the attempt to detect Gothic traits in Gatsby. This approach involves a focus on four traits that are considered Gothic, which will direct the analyses. These are as follows: 1) Limitless ambition and grotesque illusion, 2) Isolation and alienation, 3) Identity struggles, and 4) Overreaching and downfall: hubris and nemesis. The analyses have shown that it is appropriate to consider both novels in relation to these themes. Frankenstein and Gatsby are both driven and tremendously enthusiastic characters who follow a delusion. Frankenstein wants to create a human being by hand and Gatsby yearns for the golden girl who is beyond his reach. In the process, they isolate themselves from their surroundings including their home and family. The monster's alienation from the world resembles Gatsby's exclusion from the East Egg society. Both novels deal with identity issues including mirrored personalities, alter egos, and loss of self. In addition, the characters are portrayed ambiguously as hero-villains with unseeing eyes. They both seem to experience doubt regarding their pursuit; however, they simultaneously appear unenlightened. Finally, both Frankenstein and Gatsby are destroyed as a result of their overreaching. They both transcend the boundaries placed upon them, which lead to their destruction. Both can be said to commit hubris and suffer from nemesis. Hence, through the analyses the thesis demonstrates the novels' shared thematic elements.

These have been further elaborated on in the discussion, which seeks to answer the question of whether Gatsby can be considered Gothic. The conclusion must be perceived as ambiguous: Despite the evidence of a possible Gothic reading of Gatsby, it must not be ignored that *The Great Gatsby* is rarely read in a gothic perspective. In other words, the study of Gatsby as a gothic figure is a rather unexplored area and only few critics support the claim. Hence, if Gatsby can be considered gothic then he is additionally considered as something else; be it Modern, Romantic, or the victim of the corrupted American Dream. Despite the challenges, this thesis has exemplified an approach to Gatsby as a gothic character and it suggests such a reading as noteworthy.