

The Other in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby**Ali Hamada Mgallad****Abstract**

THE GREAT GATSBY is a great novel indeed. It contains, besides its elements, a significant pattern of delineation of the image of the other. This pattern is significant because it can be taken as an example of the way by which certain American writers view the other and shows the dimensions of that view.

This research is an attempt to relate to the origins of that view and to show how it develops in the light of post-modernist criticism. It is introduced with the concept of the other in the post-modernist approaches.

It adopts Jacques Lacan's and Paul Ricoeur's critical assumptions and refers too to Sigmund Freud's and others'. It analyzes and highlights the racial and cultural aspects of the central characters' views of the other.

"...the subject appears first in the other..."⁽¹⁾

Jacques Lacan

1. Introduction

It is admitted that the concept of the other is in debate a long time ago. But, by virtue of the modern tools and insights fielded by psychoanalysis, it came more into light spot and began to be more and more lucid. This research paper is intended to view this concept, being as a coin, from both facets and more.

First of all, and to put things in order, the paper is to highlight the following items and is to try to define and give sense to each: the identity, the self and the other. They will be viewed and tackled in a psychoanalytical perspective and the other will be tackled last in a social perspective as the novel meant to be discussed has a lot on that level.

It is a duty and an acknowledgment that when we are to talk about psychoanalysis we should refer to the founder and the pioneer in this field, Sigmund Freud. Yet, our reference to Freud will be short that it is necessary to refer to the modernists in this field for innovation.

For Freud, who determined three levels of identification in the human psyche: the id, the ego and the superego, we are concerned with the superego that it is, according to him, responsible for “controlling and adjusting the individual’s behaviours in accordance with the internalized standards of parental figures.” ⁽²⁾ Then, this superego is a kind of a framework that against which everything the individual is to do is measured and is to be determined in terms of validity and the other things which are to do with the last impression to be given.

As far as Jacques Lacan is concerned, the concept of the other is different. It differs from the others in its orientation. To him, the conception of the other is closely related to the perception of the self. He sees that the other is perceived first in terms of the reconciliation between the individual and himself and secondly that he emphasizes the presence of a stage that he called the ‘mirror stage’ which is crucial for the subjects. He says that “the mirror stage is considered to be the threshold of the visible world.” ⁽³⁾

The importance of this stage exceeds being just a ‘threshold’ for individuals after which they will lead ahead, it “includes a

jubilant assumption of (his) image (the individual) by the kind of being,” and it is a stage the individual undergoes “prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other ...” ⁽⁴⁾ Thus, it is obvious that Lacan identifies this stage which he supposes the individual to get reconciled first with himself and then will identify himself with the other.

So, the individual is in need to find himself and to try to reconcile with himself to understand himself and all that is to be done via, first of all, the ‘mirror’.

Hence, to find himself, the individual is or must be involved in a process of self-quest. Eventually, it is after being introduced to himself, the individual gets there to the place where he or she is able to estimate. His or her estimation includes the estimation of the self and that of the other.

In his book *SOI-MEME COMME UN AUTRE* (in English *THE SELF AS ANOTHER*), Paul Ricoeur argues that “the other is presupposed from the beginning” and that he is aware of my being as an other like him,” and that “together we target the world as a mutual nature, and together too, we build groups of people that are capable in their turn to act at the stage of history as superiour characters.” ⁽⁵⁾ Then, Ricoeur intersects with Lacan in a point where he presupposes the presence of the other from the beginning and skips the self-quest process that Lacan set for the individual after which to shift to the identification with the other.

Emmanuel Levinas who is a French philosopher spoke about “an ego” that is “burdened with the self.” He supposes that the ego he talks about is “the same ego before meeting the other.” And he continues saying that he means an ego “that did not deal with the other yet.” ⁽⁶⁾ In this way, Levinas goes along with what Lacan supposed in the first hand. But levinas’s ego differs from that of

Lacan's in that it is self-discovered and self-identified, in Lacanian terms.

Once again, we are to be back to Lacan. In his Seminar, he asserts to his students the fact that there are two others, and he differentiates one of them to be the ego. He says:

“It would be wrong of you to think that it is the same other at issue here as that other I sometimes talk about to you, that other which is the ego, more precisely its image.”⁽⁷⁾

And he continues to explain what he exactly means. He states that:

“We must distinguish two others, at least two – an other with a capital O, and an other with a small o, which is the ego.”⁽⁸⁾

Thus, and at all rates, the other is there and functions as an individual, a subject, and in the same time, as a mirror.

2. The Other, Identity and the Self in *THE GREAT GATSBY*

There is no doubt that the question of the identity is central in psychoanalysis. In its broad sense, the identity is the quality that shows the peculiarity of a person, a group of people and or a nation. And as far as literature is concerned being a means of expression, it is the medium through which one can identify others and mark their distinguishing qualities. This is a humanly endeavor. More precisely, it is all to do with man's eternal “extreme desire” as Descarte states “to learn to distinguish the true from the false, and to walk with assurance in this life.”⁽⁹⁾

In the same context, this argument sustains the established belief that man was and still is exerting efforts to know and to prove himself, by means of psychoanalysis and other means and away from the confines of religion, race, colour, etc. In terms of psychoanalysis, Edith Kurtzweil asserts in LITERATURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS that:

“It may be well true to say that this has been the first such attempt in the history of man’s efforts to know himself.”⁽¹⁰⁾

as knowing oneself is one part of shaping one’s identity.

The question of identity is strongly there in Scott Fitzgerald’s THE GREAT GATSBY. In a way or another, the novel turns around that concept of the identity. For the most, Fitzgerald introduces his principal character, Nick Caraway and his head turns many questions which are to do with the attempt to attaining at a clear-cut understanding of his own identity and it lasts with him up till the end of the novel and extends to the other characters too.

Despite the fact that it is seen by some critics as an attempt by Fitzgerald, just creating Nick’s character, to give him a “‘heightened” sense of the fundamental decencies”⁽¹¹⁾, it encompasses much that is to do with the question of the identity. It is just the same thing that Freud indicated to be the “internalized standards.”

Likewise, and just at the outset of the novel, Nick Caraway recalls attentively his father’s maxim about the real identity of the Caraways filial. His father says:

“Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone just remember that all people

in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." (12)

Reading this important speech on surface, one would say that the father is being so modest that he advises his son to take care before trying to criticize anybody. According to him, people are given things advantageous but others are not given the same, say, merits. From this standpoint, it is not fair to criticize somebody whom is destined not to have the same merit as somebody else.

Yet, it is not like that. The correct reading that the writer intended is that the Caraways, represented by now by Nick, are privileged people, that they are given certain 'advantages' others are not given them. This very belief makes the Caraways, according to the father, special people. And it is demanded now from Nick to have the same belief, the which in his turn to transfer to his posterity.

As a matter of fact, this speech is so important and its importance is augmented by the fact Fitzgerald preludes his novel with. It is a maxim that should be followed by the Caraways.

What is important about it is that it constitutes what Lacan called as the 'mirror stage' and a part of what Freud earlier called the superego as well. It is the father's intention to reflect that belief into his son. Doing as such, he plays the role of the mirror. Nick must see what his father wants him to see in himself. And henceforth, he is to view *others* accordingly.

Even too for the father, as an *other*, he views Nick or at least he wants to view him as such.

This is done, the construction of what Freud described as the "internalized framework of parental standards" is to be completed. Viewing the same speech against Levinas's comments, Nick is to perceive and acknowledge the others as being other than himself, in

a certain category, and that he and the others “target the world” all the same.

Reading on the body of the novel, we can see that Nick himself plays the role of the mirror with Gatsby. After they had breakfast at Gatsby’s mansion one day, Gatsby escorted him outside and was anxious that he expected and wished Daisy to call and approve of his offer. Gatsby got shaken and less self-confident the thing that made Nick to encourage him by making a contrast between him and the Buchanans including Daisy. Nick said:

“They are a rotten crowd... You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.” (12:160)

The contrast technique used by Nick is one that is efficient and produces the same effect as the mirror. It is by contrasting two things that you want to prove the superiority of either of them over the other. When Nick made the contrast between Gatsby and the Buchanans he certainly tried to show Gatsby’s worth and superiority over them.

Another good example is there in the middle of the novel. It is when Nick argues Jordan Baker that she is a bad driver and that she should not drive cars for her and others safety. He admitted that he was about to fall in her love. Then he confessed:

“But, I am slow-thinking and full of interior rules that act as breaks on my desires...” (12: 63)

Again, the speech above is typically in support of Freud’s comments related to the “internalized standards” against which the reflection of Lacan’s mirror is predetermined.

Moreover, the slow thinking and hesitation and the kind of misty vision which are shown in Nick's character are fairly due to, so to speak, the angle of reflection. It is simply because he does not see himself quite right from his own perspective. Rather, it is because he sees himself from another side. Lacan says:

“The subject doesn't know what he is saying, and for the best reasons, he doesn't know what he is. But he sees himself. He sees himself from the other side, in an imperfect manner.”⁽¹³⁾

The fact that the individuals usually see and let other function as mirrors can be seen in the ultimate conclusions obtained by means of the contrasts. Contrast is so important for everybody to know the real identity and value of things. We can not know what light is unless we know darkness. Let us examine the following speech said by Nick Caraway. He says:

“Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.” (12: 66)

The question is that how did Nick know that? And the answer is there in his speech as he thought for a while about Jordan and her inclination to show off and sometimes to lie. He says:

“She was incredibly dishonest... Jordan Baker instinctively avoided clever, shrewd men...” (12: 66)

That is simply because she was not fairly honest. Nick then contrasted himself with her and got to that conclusion.

Gatsby too is a goo instance. He tries to justify his love to and his identification with the strangers. He tells Nick the following secret:

“I usually find myself among strangers because I drift here and there trying to forget the sad thing that happened to me.”(12: 73)

The thing that can be inferred from this speech is that Gatsby is trying to find another mirror that has different “internalized standards” other than this of the people he knows because they reflect “the sad thing” that happened to him and he does not want to keep it.

3. THE OTHER IN ANOTHER WAY

The subject of the other has its own due right in the social studies too. Lizzy Newman states, while commenting on a sentence written by Jacques Lacan in his Seminar XVII in which he said: “there is no longer any shame” that: “the implication is that the new mode of social relations is one of hyper-permissiveness, in which there is an injunction to enjoy (jouir) as much as one wants, without the judging gaze of the Other in front of whom one might have once felt ashamed. Rather, one is encouraged to enjoy looking oneself.”⁽¹⁴⁾ This same thing can obviously be seen in all Nick’s relationships with the others. We see Nick quite free and not abiding himself by the kind of covert and overt relationships. In a sense, his character is one that follows the “new mode of social relations.” And this is equally applicable to Jordan’s character.

In the same way, and to complete the whereabouts of the subject of the other one should consider how things like race, religion, class, etc. are presented in the novel.

Talking about race, we read in the conversation between Tom Buchanan and Daisy in the presence of Nick and Jordan a very important statement declared by Tom. He preens saying:

“It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races, will have control of things... we’ve got to beat them down.”(12: 19)

Evidently, the standpoint from which the central characters view the others is marked by being “the dominant race” and this allows for further suggestions in handling the whole thing on their part.

The same racial categorization continues on and we read in the same first meeting of the central characters altogether such allegations as: “we are Nordics” by Tom and we also read Nick’s observation in which he says:

“I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all- Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners...” (12: 183)

The series of categorization goes on and we find amongst the significant instances the one in which Nick and Gatsby crossed Blackwell’s Island and a limousine passed them. The luxury car was driven by a white male chauffeur, and in which sat three modish Negros, two guys and a girl. Nick says that he:

“...laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry...” (12: 75)

And he continues showing us how he and his fellows view others saying:

“Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge” I thought, “anything at all.”(12: 75)

Last, in terms of religious discrimination, we might quote how Nick viewed the Jew Wolfshiem, Gatsby’s friend. He described him as follows:

“A small, flat-nosed Jew raised his large head and regarded me with two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril. After a moment I discovered his tiny eyes in the half-darkness.”(12: 75)

Thus, we can say that the circle of categorization and discrimination in the right of the self and the other is psychologically and ideologically-based and deeply rooted in the inside of the central characters in Fitzgerald’s THE GREAT GATSBY the thing that shows the real orientation toward others of a white dominating nation, then.

4. Conclusion

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby tackles the concept of the other. The other is viewed in such away that is characterized by hostility, vindictiveness, and at the best by underestimation.

The novel has a sense of stratification that is deeply rooted in the bonus of the racial discrimination and in the prolonged accumulation and legacy of the cultural background of both, the viewing side and the side of the other.

Finally, *The Great Gatsby* is a typical example of the novel that bears the superiority view some writers upheld and contrasted with the inferiority of the others. And this view is certainly not baseless. It is based on the ideology of peculiarity.

5. NOTES

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis* (New York:W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1978), p. 218.
2. Jacob A. Arlow, and John L. Herma, "*Psychoanalysis.*" Microsoft® Student 2009 (DVD), Redmond, WA:Microsoft Corporation, 2008.
3. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York:W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 2006), p. 77.
4. Ibid. p. 76.
5. Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-Meme Comme Un Autre* (Paris :Editions du Soleil, 2001), p. 612.
6. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalite et Infini, Essai Sur L'Exteriorite* (La Haye:M. Nijhoff, 1961), p. 57.
7. Jacques-Alain Miller, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (England:CUP, 1988), p. 236.
8. Ibid. 236.
9. Ibid. 1. p. 222.
10. Edith Kurtzweil, and William Philips, *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New York:Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 79.
11. Kenneth E. Eble, *F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York:McGraw Hill Company, 1973), p.82.

12. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (England: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 7.
13. Ibid. 7.
14. Lizzy Newman, *Book Review, Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1-2, 2006, p. 372-373.

6. Bibliography

1. Arlow, Jacob A., and Herma, John L. *“Psychoanalysis.”* Microsoft® Student 2009 (DVD), Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.
2. Eble, Kenneth E. *F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: McGraw Hill Company, 1973.
3. Fitzgerald, F. Scott *The Great Gatsby* England: Penguin Books, 1994.
4. Kurtzweil, Edith and Philips, William. *Literature and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.
5. Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 2006.
6. Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts in Psychoanalysis*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1978.
7. Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totalite et Infini, Essai Sur L’Exteriorite*. La Haye: M. Nijhoff, 1961.
8. Miller, Jacques-Alain. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. England: CUP, 1988.

-
-
9. Newman, Lizzy. *Book Review, Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 2, No. 1-2, 2006.
 10. Ricoeur, Paul. *Soi-Meme Comme Un Autre*. Paris: Editions du Soleil, 2001.

مستخلص

تعد رواية كاتسبي العظيم من الروائع. فألى جانب عناصرها السردية والجمالية العظيمة، فهي تحتوي على نمط تصويري مهم يختص بصورة الآخر. تكمن أهمية هذا النمط في امكانية أخذه كنموذج للطريقة التي يعرض بها بعض الكتاب الأميركيين رؤيتهم للآخر وأبعاد تلك الرؤية.

أن هذا البحث هو محاولة للعودة الى أصول تلك الرؤية ولأستيضاح كيفية تطورها في ضوء النقد الأدبي فيما بعد الحداثة. أذ يقدم البحث مفهوم الآخر حسب المدارس النقدية فيما بعد الحداثة.

يتبنى البحث الفرضيات النقدية لكل من جاك لاكان وبول ريكور كما ويستأنس بآراء سيغموند فرويد وآخرين. ويقدم البحث تحليلات ويسلط الأضواء على النواحي العرقية والثقافية بالنسبة لرؤى الشخصيات الرئيسية للآخر.