



## **fitzgerald's use of american architectural styles in *the great gatsby***

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Though many critics of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* have commented on the crucial importance of the buildings in the novel, none has given full and specific attention to those buildings' particular architectural styles.<sup>1</sup> This is surprising, since, following a tradition in American fiction that reaches as far back as Irving, Poe and Hawthorne, Fitzgerald in his masterpiece makes architectural style a highly effective tool. On one level the styles of his buildings form part of the vivid, impressionistic "local color" rendering of American life of the twenties which gives the novel so much of its illusion of reality. He displays an extraordinarily keen eye for the niceties of the architectural modes of 1922 and indeed ranks with Howells, the early James, Wharton and Cather as a recorder in fiction of American architectural history. But, like theirs, his often satiric architectural description functions on other levels too. The specific styles of his buildings, both individually and in their carefully developed counterpoint, embody basic aspects of his characters, reinforce his social analysis and help express the characteristically American Europe-East-West tensions that are central to the novel. Architectural style rises from mere local color to become a highly effective connotative language through which Fitzgerald can not only set his scene but also tell his story and represent his themes.

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FIGURE ONE: Nick's modest bungalow was a striking contrast to the greatest mansions among which it was set. Especially popular from 1900 to 1920, the bungalow was characterized by a low profile, a long roof sloping down over a wide front porch, and a single wide front dormer. In the East and especially along the seashore it was frequently shingled. It had a homey look. (Photo by author of house in Mansfield, Massachusetts.)

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Central in the novel looms Gatsby's "colossal"<sup>2</sup> mansion at West Egg. The significance of all the other buildings in the story is defined by their relationship to it. We see it, of course, only through the satiric yet slightly ambivalent eyes of Nick, for whom it is both an impressive though absurdly anachronistic "palace on Long Island Sound" (49) and "an elaborate road-house" (64). Imagined to have been built about 1912, "early in the 'period' craze" (89), it is a highly accurate caricature of the elaborate Châteauesque Style developed in the late nineteenth century by Richard Morris Hunt and Stanford White for the Vanderbilts and other enormously rich families of New York City, Newport and Long Island.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 1) Its large central bay (89), its high tower set asymmetrically on one side of its facade (5), its big postern (91), great arched doors, square towers (65, 91) and ranges of French windows (147) give it the eclectic, partly late Gothic, partly Renaissance, European flavor characteristic of the genre. Nick, whose comments accurately represent the sophisticated taste of the middle twenties, is amused by what he considers its showy and vulgar anachronism but yet, especially at night, cannot help being moved by its shadowy grandeur. Disparagingly, he calls it a "factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy" (5), "factual" in his remark probably implying accuracy in detail but not in whole impression. Seen at night, its silhouette against the sky is "feudal" (92)—a word with mixed connotations, savoring of foolish but generally harmless Sir Walter Scott romance, yet hinting also of a European class system. In the daytime, however, he wryly notes that one can see that its masonry is "spanking new under a thin beard of ivy" (5). Certainly its lavish marble swimming pool (5) clashes with its pretense of antiquity.

Nick's amusing account of the interior could well be read as a satiric (though, of course, unfair) guidebook description of the Vanderbilts' "enormous" (89) Newport cottages "The Breakers" and "Marble House." From the high and splendid great hall (168-169), where Gatsby has indecorously set up his "road-house" bar, open the public rooms, each in its own pastiche of a "period" style: "Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons" (92), a Versailles-like "long, many-windowed room which overhung the terrace" (51), and, most spectacular of all, the Merton College Library (92)—"a high Gothic library, panelled with carved English oak, and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas" (45). The last is, of course, a close parallel to the real Gothic Room in "Marble House." (Figure 2) Upstairs—here the parallel with "The Breakers" is almost exact—there are "period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk," "dressing-rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths" (92). Here, too, (as in several Newport mansions) are the owner's contrastingly simple bedroom and chaste Adam study (92-93). (Figure 3)

The great chateau, however, also has rich symbolic significance. In its vast size, its costliness and its ostentation, it is a commentary on what Nick

FIGURE TWO: Its high mansard, paired pavilions and rusticated base show how French Châteaux elements like those used by Hunt in Ochre Court were later employed to give “class” to a hotel always known for its lavish expenditures. The Plaza was designed by Henry J. Hardenbergh in 1907. It was a favorite haunt of Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. (Photo courtesy of the Plaza Hotel.)

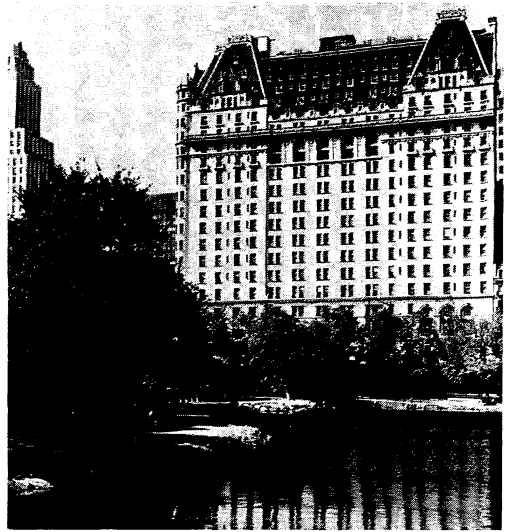
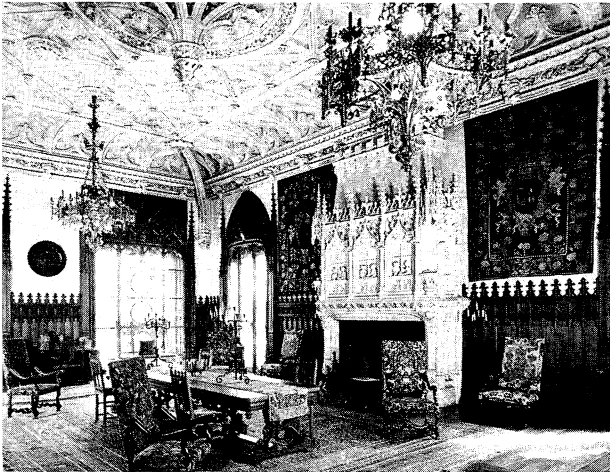


FIGURE THREE: In his Gothic “Merton College Library” Fitzgerald parodies the penchant of Richard Morris Hunt and others to embellish their great Châteauxque mansions with impressive pastiches of Old World interiors made up in part from authentic fragments imported from abroad. Here is the Gothic Room from Marble House, the costly Newport “cottage” designed by Hunt in 1892 for William K. and Alva Vanderbilt. (Photo by John R. Hopf. Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Newport County.)



regards as the essential vulgarity and tasteless extravagance of the new wealth of the period. Even more significantly, what Nick considers the aesthetic failure of its derivative and anachronistic architecture—late in the novel he calls it a “huge incoherent failure of a house” (181)—symbolizes to him the impossibility of effectively recapturing the past. In his view, there is something false in building a great Norman Hôtel de Ville

in West Egg. The chateau is not genuine; the stone behind its raw fringe of ivy is too new, its period interiors too “factually” studied. The falseness of the design, however, is not merely aesthetic or historical. It is a function of the equally inappropriate and doomed desire of the rich brewer who built it to Found in America a Family—a “house” in the European sense. Like the brewer’s preposterous attempt to get the cottage-owners of West Egg to roof their cottages with thatch (89), it represents a lack of understanding of American reality and failure to sympathize with American ideals.

In addition to suggesting the inappropriateness of trying to import an alien concept of aristocracy into the United States, the mansion makes a comment on the spuriousness of an American “nobility” whose “nobleness” rests on money alone. The rich brewer by building his pretentious eclectic house had attempted to buy gentility. But true nobility is not to be bought, even when the money spent for it has been earned honestly. It is certainly not to be bought with corrupt money. The “house” of Gatsby—

both his actual mansion and his dream of an aristocratic life with Daisy—rests in the end on Wolfsheim's rackets. Like its architecture (as Nick judges the architecture) it is a false simulacrum and fated to fall. Architectural decadence, as Ruskin would remind us, grows out of moral decadence; architectural style has connotations beyond itself.

In such use of symbolic architectural style *The Great Gatsby*, though it seems so much a novel of the twenties, is clearly heir to an older American fictional tradition. The "feudal" style of the central mansion is "Gothic" not only in the architectural sense but also in the literary sense of Poe and Hawthorne and Melville and James. The great halls and Marie Antoinette music rooms and long galleries overlooking terraces are shadowed by a brooding sense of mysterious evil. Like the House of Usher, the House of the Seven Gables, and to a lesser degree Saddle Meadows, Bly and the Bellegarde chateau at Fleurières, the house hides a secret crime or a half-mad obsessive passion. Its relationship to the House of the Seven Gables is especially close. That mansion too was built by a man—Colonel Pyncheon—who sought to Found a Family in America. He too failed, partly because inherited social status is repugnant to American ideals and partly because he laid the foundations of his house on mercenary crime—on the judicial murder of Mathew Maule in order to appropriate his land.

The fact that Gatsby's mansion functions in part as a symbolic representation of its owner is an even more important parallel to the American Gothic tradition. In Hawthorne's novel the author-narrator, looking at the House of the Seven Gables, sees in its facade the expression of Judge Pyncheon. The House of Usher in Poe's tale, in an occult way, images Roderick and Madeline; the crack in its wall is the fissure in Roderick's breaking mind, the relationship between it and its image in the tarn figures that between brother and sister, its fall is their fall and that of their ancient "house."<sup>4</sup> So here, the architecture of Gatsby's mansion represents Gatsby. Superficially, it is rich, handsome, aristocratic, magnificent. It pretends to be a building of heroic romance. It embodies his vision of himself as a bold baron, perhaps a robber baron, wooing the fairytale "king's daughter, the golden girl" from her high "white palace" (120) to his noble castle. He desperately wants Daisy to visit his house (80), and with infinite pride he shows her through it, wishing her to see him in it and it in him. And, at least for a time, she does. Alternatively, he sees himself as a gallant young Lochinvar, faithful in love and dauntless in war, riding out of the West to sweep up his beloved and in defiance of her bridegroom carry her away (in a long gleaming yellow automobile) to his feudal keep. With only slight irony the usually cynical Nick compares him momentarily to a Knight of the Round Table following the gleam of the green light in quest of an impossible Grail (49).

But, as Nick more often sees them, the house and Gatsby are both fakes. The mansion is no more a feudal keep or an old Norman Hôtel de Ville than Gatsby is an Oxford graduate. True, its architecture does embody "factual" elements of old styles and indeed the whole of an authentic Gothic library which, to Owl-Eyes' amazement, even contains

real books.<sup>5</sup> But *Gatsby* too has authentic details: he did study at Oxford, he did receive a medal from Montenegro, he does have a card from the Police Commissioner. "Factually," in details, he too is genuine. But, like the brewer's, his "nobility" is based only on money, money from the rackets. He has assumed a facade of British culture and language, but in the daylight one can see through the ivy to the raw, new stone beneath. Though he has given himself a new name, basically he is still vulgar James Gatz, the man who sets up a speak-easy bar in his baronial hall. Furthermore, just as to many architectural critics of the twenties there always seemed a hint of false, impossible nostalgia in even the greatest and most beautiful buildings of the Châteauesque Style, so too *Gatsby* tries in vain to recapture those golden, romantic, almost mythic days with Daisy in Louisville during the War. He really thought that one could bring back the past, and for a few weeks the illusion seemed true. But as Nick sees it, neither in architectural style nor in life is the past really recoverable; any attempt to relive it is necessarily false: "You can't repeat the past" (111).

Furthermore, the mansion also images the ambivalence of *Gatsby* as traditional Gothic hero. Like his enormous house, he is in some lights great—"the great *Gatsby*" of the title. He is a man of great force, great determination, great possibilities for good or evil. He stands alone; his singleness of purpose sets him apart. "There was," Nick says, "something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life . . . an extraordinary gift for hope" (2). He is worth, Nick calls out to him in the darkness, "the whole damn bunch put together" (154). There is also a tragic loneliness about him, a loneliness like that of the magnificent house after all the gay parties are over and it is shut up. He has an ideal by which he lives, whereas the others around him have none. Effectively symbolized by the simplicity of the decor of his bedroom—"the simplest room of all" (93)—and private study, he has in his private recesses an almost innocent simplicity, a refreshingly idealistic Western faith. Even his adulterous liaison with Daisy in his eyes seems pure and good. Superior to the morals of ordinary men, he feels married to her (149). When the inevitable denouement comes, it is on one level tragic. In Gothic terms the novel might justifiably be renamed the *Fall of the House of Gatsby*.

But despite its magnificence and grandeur, *Gatsby*'s great mansion inherits many of the sinister connotations of mystery and evil that characterize its many forebears in Gothic romance. As it is ambivalent (old yet new, European yet American, aristocratic yet vulgar), so from the very first pages of the novel, *Gatsby* too as Gothic hero shares its sinister as well as its heroic characteristics. There is a shadow, a mystery about him. Gossip has it that he is a cousin of the Kaiser (33) or a nephew of Von Hindenburg (61), that he was a German spy during the War (44), that he has killed a man (49, 61). "I'm scared of him," says Catherine; "I'd hate to have him get anything on me" (33). He is a second cousin to the devil (61). He may be a bootlegger or a racketeer. He receives mysterious telephone calls. Though wealthy, generous and dressed by the best English tailors, he is associated with Meyer Wolfsheim, the man who fixed the

World Series. Like so many other Gothic heroes, he hides a secret and almost mad adulterous passion. His lonely, perhaps blasphemous ritual of adoration, lifting from his night-darkened lawn his hands in idolatrous supplication to the green light across the bay, has in it much of the Gothic strangeness that imbues Poe. Though “hugely” impressive in its way, the “Gothic” architecture of Gatsby’s personality is no more “coherent” than that of his vast “ancestral” (154) mansion. Nick, who at times catches glimpses of his lonely, mythic grandeur, in summary remarks that he lacked the “fundamental decencies” (1) and represented “everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (2).

## ii

Once the significance of the architecture of Gatsby’s mansion is established, the symbolic meanings of the styles of the other important buildings readily fall into place. Prime among them is the Buchanans’ far less ostentatious, cheerful red-and-white mansion symbolically facing Gatsby’s in fashionable East Egg across the bay. In its architecture Fitzgerald gives a remarkably accurate and vivid impressionistic picture of the Georgian Colonial Revival style—what Mary Mix Foley calls “Millionaire’s Colonial”—that in the early 1900s and even more in the twenties contested with Châteauesque for supremacy in the wealthy enclaves of Newport and Long Island.<sup>6</sup> Built of red brick with white stone or wood trim, set on a “lawn [that] started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens,” covered with bright vines, its French windows “wide open to the warm windy afternoon” (6-7), it is an ideal example of a seaside mansion of the era, designed both to fit into its natural setting and to recall American tradition. Its living spaces are blended into the outdoors. In front is the sunny porch overlooking the Sound (7) where on Nick’s first visit Tom stands to welcome him. Around other parts are “a chain of interconnecting verandahs” with wicker settees (17). Through a high hallway Tom leads Nick to a salon where he finds Daisy and Jordan—“a bright rosy-colored space [recalling the rose garden outside], fragilely bound into the house by French windows at either end.”

The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding-cake of the ceiling, and then rippled over the wine-colored rug . . . (8).

The room, darkened by awnings, has a brick (Georgian) fireplace; Daisy and Jordan lie somnolently on one of the great couches popular at the time (115-116). Dining room, library, pantry and bedrooms are not particularized, but we can be sure that they are open and, if not shaded by

awnings, sunny and bright. Even the grounds—the former garage a quarter of a mile down the road now made into stables for Tom’s polo ponies (119-120), the gate, the long gravel drive from the road (143, 146)—are brought sharply to life.

How different this house from Gatsby’s! Though it is, as Nick remarks, surprisingly elaborate, and perhaps as costly as Gatsby’s, this is not a flamboyant, imported, Gothic-Renaissance Beaux-Arts chateau. It is built of simple brick, not of marble. It is long and low (probably two-story or two stories and a half), clinging to the American soil. It does not pretend or blatantly aspire like Gatsby’s vulgar castle. Instead of Gatsby’s formal terraces with their great marble steps, here there are restrained brick Georgian walks and (for a slight touch of European culture) an understated, sunken Italian garden, “a half acre of deep, pungent roses” (8). Inside, the high front hall has nothing of the public “road-house” or “Hôtel de Ville” atmosphere of Gatsby’s pretentious (Nick might say sham) baronial hall. There is no bar here. Instead of looking down distantly on a marble terrace, the French windows of the front room open directly on the lawn and the sea. For this house, with its connotations of a dignified old American aristocratic tradition, though lavish and large and not wholly authentic, represents old money, restrained good taste, a genuine, native quality. It is East Egg, not West Egg. It speaks a self-confident social status that does not need to shout architecturally yet likes to express its wealth. Though, like Gatsby, Tom Buchanan comes from the West, with his older money and Eastern education he has been able to buy into what Nick regards as a far more genuine tradition. Even his pride in being the first man to turn a garage into a stable (119) may suggest his clinging to an older, more natural social ideal. Indeed, throughout the novel Tom is regularly associated with animals, Gatsby with motor cars. Nick sees Tom and Daisy as more genuine, though in their way they are equally as hollow as, or more hollow than, Gatsby (certainly they are harder and more uncaring). Like the architecture of their house, they belong. They are not mere pastiche.

Architectural style is used, though less elaborately, to express the other characters too. The modesty of Nick’s weatherbeaten little wooden house squeezed between two great mansions in West Egg (5) says a great deal about Nick’s own modest self-deprecation. He has a “shed” for his car, not a garage like Gatsby’s nor a stable like Tom’s. His drive is rocky, his lawn, until Gatsby’s men mow it, unkempt. His proud parvenu neighbors regard his small house—so small that there is a distinct feeling of cramped space the day that Daisy and Gatsby come to tea—an “eyesore” (5), as some of the rich owners of palatial Newport “cottages” must have considered the occasional modest 1870s frame houses that still remain on Ocean Drive or Bellevue Avenue. But though small, though in comparison to the great stone chateau only “cardboard,” his weatherbeaten house is only fifty yards from the ocean—much closer than the Buchanans’, for instance. And, even more significant, it is a bungalow (3), built in the bungalow style that flourished first on the West coast but later swept across

the country,<sup>7</sup> (Figure 4) finding its greatest acceptance early in the twentieth century in the Midwest. Unassuming, middle-class, comfortable, democratic, completely naturalized to the United States though of Asian origin, it carries with it in the novel strong connotations of that homelike Middle West (Fitzgerald is doubtless thinking of St. Paul) which Nick so vividly remembers from his Christmas vacations and to which at the end of the story he returns. With great precision, it also represents Nick himself.

Little is actually said of the Fays' house in Louisville, but that little gives a vivid impression of Daisy's background. On a street of flapping flags and wide lawns, it has the largest flag and the widest lawn (75). One guesses that it is white, for Daisy is the "king's daughter" "high in a white palace" (120). Probably it is in the neoclassic imitation-Southern plantation style favored in Kentucky—and Zelda Sayre's Alabama—at the period, an aristocratic, traditional, revival American architecture with many parallels to the Colonial Revival of Daisy's and Tom's later home.<sup>8</sup> (Figure 5) To Gatsby, who "had never been in such a beautiful house before," it was utterly fascinating. "There was a ripe mystery about it, a hint of bedrooms upstairs more beautiful and cool than other bedrooms, of gay and radiant activities taking place through its corridors . . ." (148). Like Daisy herself, it represented to him a rich upper-class way of life that he had never experienced. "Her porch was bright with luxury of bought star-shine; the wicker of the settee squeaked fashionably as she turned toward him and he kissed her curious and lovely mouth." Into her home, into the rich, full life that it represented, she could vanish, leaving Gatsby—nothing (149). For as Gatsby is his pastiche chateau, so this house is not only Daisy's but also Daisy, representing not only her as an individual but also the traditional, comfortable, patrician culture from which she comes.

More satirically, the apartment on West 158th Street images Myrtle Wilson. When one recalls that a whole white "frosted wedding cake" adorns the ceiling of the Buchanans' crimson salon, the irony of Fitzgerald's description of Myrtle's apartment as be-

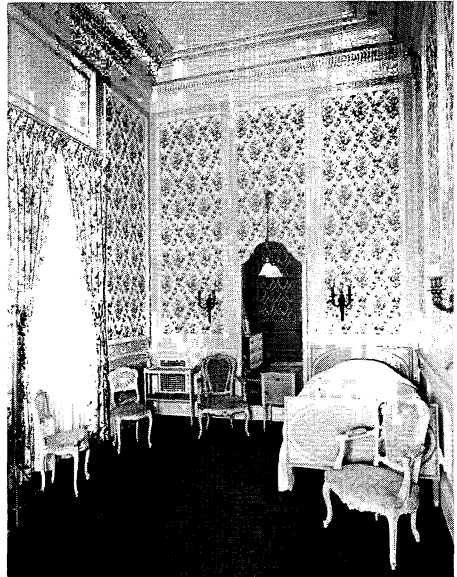


FIGURE FOUR: The "chaste" Adam style in which Nick says Gatsby's second-floor study was decorated is here exemplified by an upstairs bedroom in *The Breakers*, the enormous mansion built by Richard Morris Hunt for Cornelius Vanderbilt in Newport in 1892-1895. To Nick it symbolizes a basic innocence in Gatsby untouched by the tawdry magnificence of the flamboyant style of his life. (Photo by Richard Cheek. Courtesy of the Preservation Society of Newport County.)





FIGURE FIVE: Gatsby's mansion, described as a colossal "factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side," can well be imagined as a slightly satiric version of Ochre Court, the huge French-inspired mansion built in Newport in 1888 for Ogden Goelet by Richard Morris Hunt. Ochre Court too is directly on the sea, and its roofs at night have the "feudal" touch that Nick enjoys yet derides in Gatsby's house. (Photo by James Garrison, Figure 92 in Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* [Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1980]. Reprinted courtesy of M.I.T. Press and James Garrison, who kindly sent us the print.)

ing in just "one slice of a long cake of apartment-houses" (28) becomes amusingly clear: she gets only a slice of Tom! But Myrtle's apartment plays against Gatsby's house too. Like Gatsby, she too, also with great energy, is a social climber. Her huge set of French-inspired tapestried furniture depicting "scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles," like his Norman chateau with its long French-windowed gallery, makes a pretense to French aristocracy. But it so crowds her little top-floor apartment—"a small living-room, a small dining-room, a small bedroom, and a bath" (29)—that it, and particularly its Sun King connotations, become utterly absurd. Yet with "impressive" but somewhat drunken "hauteur" (31), she plays, despite the little dog's sick whimpering and Tom's brutal slap that breaks her nose, at having an artistic (Mr. McKee's photographs) and literary (the novels *Simon Called Peter* and *Town Tattle*) salon just as, on a grand scale, Gatsby with his assumed British mannerisms and Trimalchio-like entertaining plays his game. It is only the difference in size and costliness between the vividly suggested, tawdry, inexpensive top-floor apartment in unfashionable Washington Heights and the magnificent roadhouse-palace on Long Island that changes Byronic or Gothic tragedy into maudlin farce.

The architectural intonations of Wilson's garage are also cogent. Near the railroad that takes Nick and Tom to New York, under the persistent and unnerving stare of Dr. Eckleburg, stands utterly by itself in the Valley of Ashes

a small block of yellow brick sitting on the edge of the waste land, a sort of compact Main Street ministering to it, and contiguous to absolutely nothing. One of the three shops it contained was for rent and another was an all-night restaurant, approached by a trail of ashes; the third was a garage—*Repairs*. GEORGE B. WILSON. *Cars bought and sold* (24).

Like Fitzgerald's other buildings, this too is a carefully observed bit of local color. Such purely vernacular buildings of yellow brick<sup>9</sup> with cement-colored walls, little office (26) with raised threshold, and living quarters above could be found in the dingiest, most hopeless parts of many Eastern cities and towns in the early twentieth century. Even in terms of the taste of the time, which valued many sorts of architecture that until recently we have been prone to decry, such yellow garages and storefronts ranked at the very bottom of the architectural scale. Fitzgerald is thus using this genre as the very ultimate in shabby, irremediable tastelessness. The color yellow itself, as Milton R. Stern has pointed out, stands as a debased or dirtied form of the gold which Fitzgerald so often uses to help characterize both "the golden girl" Daisy and Gatsby himself. It is also the same yellow of the "fog that runs its back upon the window panes" of that other, Prufrockian waste land of T. S. Eliot. The doomed Wilson, illiterate and unsophisticated though he be, is an empty and hopeless Prufrock dwelling in a dusty land of shadows, even though eventually his revolver does "Disturb the universe" of the novel.<sup>10</sup> Yet, ironically, he and his hopeless garage hover at the edges of a great tragic story of love and death. Enveloped in the romantic aura of the tale, the usually satiric Nick can almost come to imagine that, like some dilapidated hovel in an Oriental Gothic romance, "this shadow of a garage must be [only] a blind, and that sumptuous and romantic apartments were concealed overhead" (25). One thinks of Gatsby's romantic assertion that he had "lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe—Paris, Venice, Rome—collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little, things for myself only, and trying to forget something very sad that had happened . . . long ago" (66). One fantasy is hardly more incredible than the other.

Aside from the boat in which Gatsby was fabled to live that "looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore" (98)—a touch of fantasy that relates to Dan Cody's peripatetic yacht—Fitzgerald uses three more buildings. Two of these are in New York City. The first is the cellar restaurant representing, despite the ironic Presbyterian nymphs of its ceiling, the underworld in which Gatsby moves and feeds with Wolfsheim. The second, a sharp contrast, is the fashionable Plaza Hotel overlooking Central Park. (Figure 6) There, in the tea-garden, Jordan first tells Nick what she knows of the war-time relationship between Gatsby and Daisy (75). There, in the parlor of a "swell suite" (126-127), Nick and Jordan spend a sweltering afternoon listening to Tom and Daisy quarrel as faint strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March rise ironically from the ballroom below. Here again, though Fitzgerald uses an actual building instead of designing his own, architectural style is revealing. The



FIGURE SIX: Impressive white mansions and wide lawns such as these help to characterize Daisy Buchanan. Their high-pillared porches and Neoclassic style hint of a Southern tradition of plantation aristocracy. This street, pictured about 1919, is in a wealthy residential section of Montgomery, Alabama, where Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald grew up. (Photo from Arthur Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald and His World* London: Thames and Hudson, 1972, p. 40. Original in Alabama Department of Archives and History.)

Plaza's rusticated bottom stages, its high mansard roof, its side bays stretched out of all proportion by their tremendous height, its uneasy combination of aristocratic Old World elegance with modern skyscraper size and obvious commercial purpose give it an ironic relationship to Châteauesque Style.<sup>11</sup> Like Gatsby's mansion, it is both a palace and a roadhouse. But because it is patronized by the "best" people, what Nick might see as the falsity of its architecture does not matter. Here can meet the pretentious vulgarity of West Egg and the old-wealth snobbery of East Egg. Here, indeed, Gatsby and Tom do meet—tragically. The marble floor of the stylish hotel's lobby foreshadows the marble bottom of the spurious chateau's anachronistic swimming pool.

Thus the houses in the novel, as W. T. Lhamon, Jr., has rightly pointed out, are not (as Fitzgerald's famous final passage might suggest) "inessential." To the book they are essential. With superb skill Fitzgerald has used the interplay of their architectural styles to set his scene, represent his characters and give structure to his action. But they do even more. Seen through Nick's often ironic eyes, architectural style reveals and comments on the social structure, the taste and the moral values (or lack of moral values) of the twenties. Fitzgerald's satiric yet ambivalently wistful image of America of his time is delineated with high effectiveness through it. Not to recognize its importance is to miss much of the book's art and import. Significantly, however, Fitzgerald does not particularize the architecture of one important structure. He leaves vague the specific style of the Mid-western home to which at the end of the novel Nick finally returns. We are

told only that it is “the Carraway house” (177), the symbol of a continuing, unspectacular, rooted,<sup>12</sup> yet rewarding way of life. It is the paradigmatic “vernacular” American home, perhaps only a fond memory or a wistful hope. Who can specifically delineate a dream? What architectural style has it? Fitzgerald’s artistry is as sure here in his omission as, elsewhere in his great novel, in his superb connotative use of particular American architectural styles.

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### notes

1. The most explicit comments are those by Milton R. Stern in *The Golden Moment: The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Urbana, 1970), 211-241, and André Le Vot, *F. Scott Fitzgerald, A Biography*, translated by William Byron (Garden City, New York, 1983), 149. In “The Essential Houses of *The Great Gatsby*,” *Markham Review*, 6 (1977), 56-60, W. T. Lhamon, Jr., discusses the complex symbolic patterning of the houses but does not comment directly on specific styles.

2. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Scribner Library edition (New York, c. 1953), 5. Succeeding references will be placed in parentheses in the text.

3. See Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1969), 141-145; and Mary Mix Foley, *The American House* (New York, 1980), 199-203.

4. Melville, too, in *Pierre* embodies possibly sinister characters such as Pierre’s father and his ambiguous half-sister Isabel in architectural style. Faulkner uses a similar technique in *Absalom, Absalom*.

5. Gatsby’s library, quiet amid the tumult of the huge party, should be compared to the library of the Yale Club in New York, whither Nick conscientiously retreats to study, secluding himself from the rioters at the bar (57). Significantly, the library in the Buchanan house is barely mentioned (16).

6. Foley, 210-211; Whiffen, 159-165.

7. Whiffen, 217-221; Foley, 220.

8. For a picture of a characteristic upper-class street of the period in Montgomery, Alabama, see Arthur Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald and His World* (London, 1972), 40. Its color may also be hinted by Jordan Baker’s allusion to Daisy’s “white girlhood” in Louisville (20).

9. In the 1890s and early twentieth century, spilling over into the twenties, there was a fashion for building in yellow brick. At first, mansions, museums, collegiate structures, even churches, were built of it, but by the twenties it had lost all dignity and was used only for the humblest storefronts and garages.

10. On the connotations of gold and yellow in the novel, see Stern, 267-286; Robert Emmet Long, *The Achieving of The Great Gatsby* (Lewisburg, New Jersey, 1979), 134-138; and especially Le Vot, 147-152.

11. See Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*, rev. ed. (New York, 1978), 216. Fitzgerald’s characterization of Gatsby’s Rolls-Royce as an (hotel) “omnibus” bringing guests from the city to Long Island (39) also strengthens the connection between the mansion and the hotel.

12. William A. Fahey, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the American Dream* (New York, 1973), 78, speaks of the “rootedness” of Middle Western life. The Carraway house may be reminiscent of the houses of Fitzgerald’s own youth: his grandfather’s house in St. Paul with its cupola and shell-bordered walk, his parents’ St. Paul house in “a lonely sheltered spot” on tree-lined Irving Place, and their clapboarded Buffalo house with its turret that resembled a witch’s hat. See Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald* (New York, 1962), 4, 11, 13; and Mizener, 5, 88-89.