

# Jay Gatsby as Tragic Hero of Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby

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Jay Gatsby as Tragic Hero of Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* According to Aristotle, there are a number of characteristics that identify a tragic hero: he must cause his own downfall; his fate is not deserved, and his punishment exceeds the crime; he also must be of noble stature and have greatness. These are all characteristics of Jay Gatsby, the main character of Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby is a tragic hero according to Aristotle's definition. Jay Gatsby is an enormously rich man, and in the flashy years of the jazz age, wealth defined importance. Gatsby has endless wealth, power and influence but never uses material objects selfishly. Everything he owns exists only to attain his vision. Nick feels "inclined to reserve all judgements" (1), but despite his disapproval of Gatsby's vulgarity, Nick respects him for the strength and unselfishness of his idealism. Gatsby is a romantic dreamer who wishes to fulfill his ideal by gaining wealth in hopes of impressing and eventually winning the heart of the materialistic, superficial Daisy. She is, however, completely undeserving of his worship. "Then it had been merely the stars to which he had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor" (79). Nick realizes Gatsby's estate, parties, shirts and other seemingly "purposeless" possessions are not purposeless. Everything Gatsby does, every

move he makes and every decision he conceives is for a reason. He wants to achieve his ideal, Daisy. Gatsby's "purposeless splendor" is all for the woman he loves and wishes to represent his ideal. Furthermore, Gatsby believes he can win his woman with riches, and that his woman can achieve the ideal she sta..... middle of paper .....w World" (182). Gatsby's vision corresponds to that of the explorers who discover the promise of the New World. Gatsby is a man of extreme capabilities but he fails to see the inevitability of his vision's failure, and in his inability to see this, he keeps trying to attain it. He does everything in his power to accomplish this vision, until his death. Daisy indirectly causes Gatsby's death, making her more than ever, unworthy of Gatsby's affections. Ironically, Gatsby lived for Daisy and up to his death, believed and had faith in her and his vision. Works Cited Dillon, Andrew. "The Great Gatsby: The Vitality of Illusion." *The Arizona Quarterly* 44 Spr. 1988: 49-61. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. Irwin, John T. "Compensating Visions: The Great Gatsby." *Southwest Review* 77 Autumn 1992: 536-545.

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