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Course: American Literature

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## **The Great Gatsby**

### **1. Catching Motion**

Like other modernist works, the novel experiments with the text at too many levels. One of these level is “catching motion.” One of the experimental techniques Fitzgerald used is a genuine attempt to catch motion in his narratives, where the difference between animate and non-animate is reduced to none. In the quote, he describes a house, which is supposed to be static as all buildings, but the author tries to put in motion:

The lawn 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 - finally when it reached the house drifting up the side in bright vines as though from the momentum of its run.

The same goes with the scene of the valley of ashes:

This is a valley of ashes — a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of gray cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.”

Another example could be in the scene of the phone ringing at the beginning of the novel, where this static object (the phone) becomes suddenly a major character in the scene, probably more important than all the other animate characters (Nick,

Tom, Daisy and Jordan Backer). Contrariwise, flesh-and-blood human beings are often reduced the status of still objects, even Gatsby, the main character in the novel, is referred to by the narrator as a “machine that registers earthquakes ten thousand miles away.” [the irony that he didn’t foresee the earthquake that befalls him by the end]. In another example, a vivid description of making juice, the narrator speaks about a machine that produces juice from two hundred oranges with two hundred presses on a button from a butler thumb. The butler, here, is reduced to an automatic pressing by his thumb.

## **2. Conversion of Senses and Qualities**

As we observed before (introduction to modernism), attributing sound qualities to visual (describing Daisy) “technique of conversion.” This technique, among others, is some sort of revolution against the dominance of realism. Often labelled as “Anti-realism” the author in such examples inquires “what do we really know?” Qualities, are human qualities the ones we already know and experience? Similar to the confusion of animate (purely a human quality) and non-animate.

## **3. Social Class Conflict:**

Probably, one of the main topics in this novel is the division between social classes and the attempt of each character to ascend to a higher class of their own. Myrtle and Gatsby are examples of this attempt, which fails dramatically by the end of the novel. However, Nick Caraway takes the other direction in the novel; instead of ascending, he tries to descend to a lower class. The latter fails to do so, but his failure is not as dramatic.