



The Great Gatsby and Icarus

Exposing Parallels and Problems
within an Entropic Universe

5 May 2015

Anna Wiechmann

Topic Selection

- From an Education standpoint:
 - *The Great Gatsby* has literary merit and was voted the best twentieth century American novel.
 - Ovid's *Metamorphoses* play a key role in contemporary society.
 - Aristotle's *The Poetics*: “one of the most illuminating and influential books... After 22 centuries, it remains the most stimulating and helpful of all analytical works” (Cooper 3)

Initial Reception of *The Great Gatsby*

- According to Fitzgerald:
 - **“blurred and patchy”**
 - “ I never at any one time saw [Gatsby] clear myself—for he started out as one man I knew and then changed into myself”
 - “gave no account (and had no feeling about or knowledge of) the emotional relations between Gatsby and Daisy from the time of their reunion to the catastrophe”
- According to others:
 - It signaled the end of Fitzgerald’s success.
 - “Even in conception and construction, *The Great Gatsby* seems a little raw.”
 - **“painfully forced”**

Modern Criticism on *The Great Gatsby*

- ▣ Symbolism
- ▣ Doubleness of the Characters
- ▣ Style and Structure
- ▣ Relation to the American Dream
- ▣ **My Analysis:** Taking it back farther and examining it in light of **classical or archetypal models**, *The Poetics* and the Icarus and Daedalus myth.



The Parallels

Imprisonment

Aspirations and the Use of Imitation

Illegitimacy in the Means of Ascension

Devastating Falls

Foil Characters

Imprisonment



The Great Gatsby

Jay Gatsby was born and raised in the middle-of-nowhere North Dakota, as a child of **inconsequential parents**. Because of the actions and identities of his parents, James Gats found himself essentially **trapped** by an impoverished family, a worthless name, and a lack of opportunities for achieving greatness.



Icarus and Daedalus

Icarus was **trapped** and punished because of his **father**. King Minos had imprisoned Daedalus on the island of Crete for two reasons: to punish him for helping Pasiphaë to mate with a bull and to prevent him from spreading knowledge about the Labyrinth that he had created.

Aspiration and Imitation



The Great Gatsby

Jay's financial and social ascension is drastic and mysterious to the other characters in the novel and readers alike, giving those around him a sense of wonder. He aspires to regain Daisy's affection by imitating her lifestyle.



Icarus and Daedalus

Icarus refused to be content with moderation in his ascent in flight; he did not follow the conservative course that his father demonstrated. Daedalus' invention imitated the wings of a bird.

Illegitimacy in the Means of Ascension



The Great Gatsby

Gatsby resorted to bootlegging and organized crime to make his money. In order to win Daisy back, he illegitimately acquired millions of dollars, bought a gaudy mansion in West Egg, and threw lavish parties every weekend.



Icarus and Daedalus

He flew because of the work, brilliance, and inventiveness of his father. Icarus was a hindrance to his father's work. He "Stood by and watched, and raised his shiny face/To let a feather, light as down, fall on it,/Or stuck his thumb into the yellow wax,/Fooling around, the way a boy will, always,/Whenever a father tries to get some work done," (Ovid 187-88).

Devastating Fall



The Great Gatsby

Gatsby's fall comes in two parts: when Daisy rejects him in New York and when he is murdered by George Wilson, taking the blame for Daisy's reckless driving.



Icarus and Daedalus

Icarus "soared higher, higher, drawn to the vast heaven/ Nearer the sun, and the wax that held the wings/ Melted in that fierce heat, and the bare arms/ beat up and down in the air, and lacking oarage/ Took hold of nothing," (Ovid 123-128).

Foil Characters



The Great Gatsby

Nick Carraway is more of a realist and recognizes the limitations of the human will and time.



Icarus and Daedalus

Daedalus stands for balance and moderation, Icarus represents the impulsive and passionate.

Nick and Daedalus are both characters whose actions and attitudes serve to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament of their respective protagonists. Their presence strengthens the impact of both stories by highlighting the differences in ideals, attitudes, and behaviors.



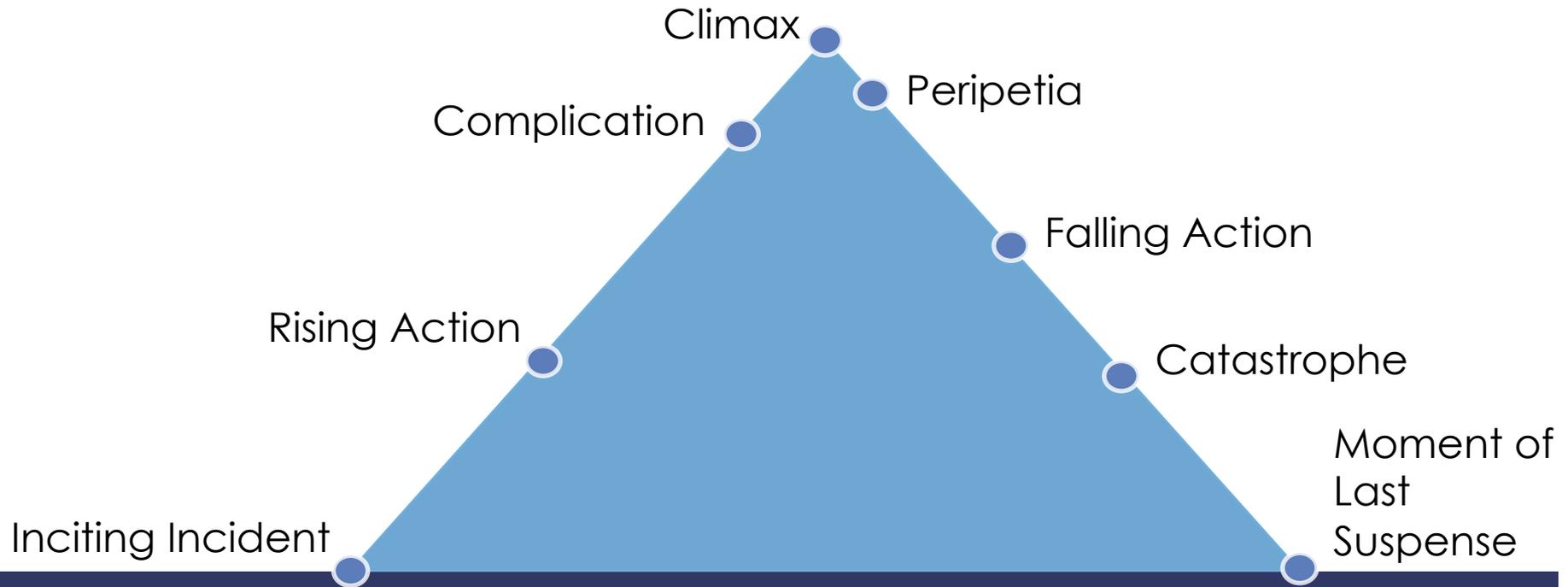
The Poetics

Aristotle defined tragedy as being the “mimesis of action which is elevated, complete, and of magnitude; in language embellished by distinct forms in its sections; employing a mode of enactment, not narrative; and through pity and fear accomplishing catharsis of such emotions”

Focusing on plot, characters, diction, thought, spectacle, and melody.

The Plot

- ▣ Whole
- ▣ Complete
- ▣ Of a certain magnitude



Freytag's Pyramid

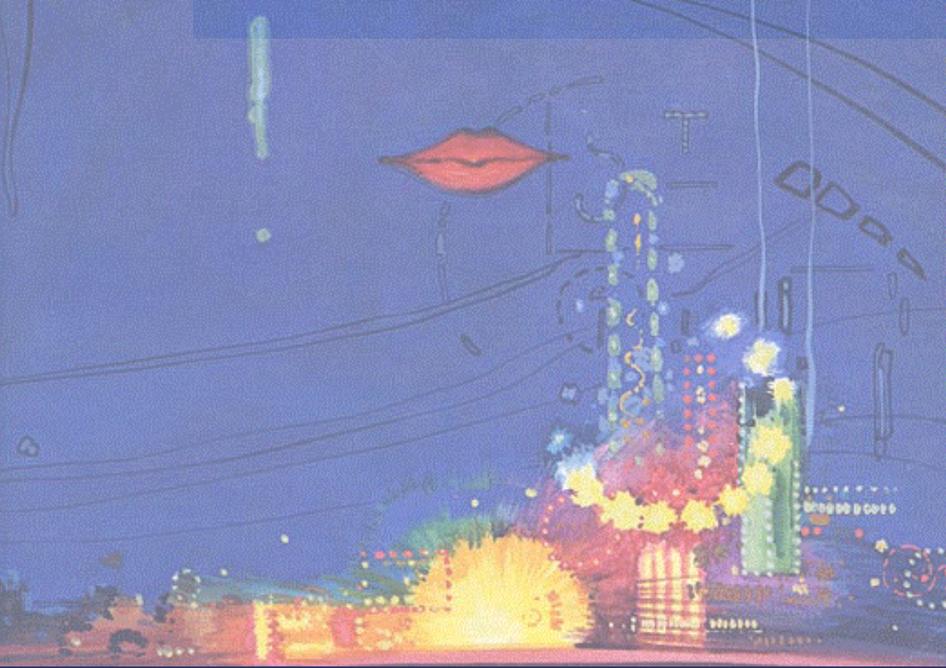
Both *The Great Gatsby* and the Icarus and Daedalus myth have each of these elements.

The Character

- ▣ Hamartia & Hubris
- ▣ Prosperous
- ▣ Fortune must go from good to bad
- ▣ Fitness of character; true to life
- ▣ Consistency
- ▣ True to life, and yet more beautiful

So what?

- ▣ The purpose of myth and fiction, of all literature is to teach and instruct.
- ▣ We need to learn the lessons of both of these works:
 - ▣ We live a world where things have a tendency toward decay, but we have this marvelous capacity for hope.
 - ▣ While we need to be aware of the limitations and risks associated with our dreams, ultimately ...



We beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

Works Cited

- Cooper, Lane. *The Poetics of Aristotle, Its Meaning and Influence*. New York: Cooper Square, 1963. Print.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1993. Print.
- Francis Cugat. *Cover of The Great Gatsby*. Scribner & Sons, 1925. JPEG
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Rolfe Humphries. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955. Print.
- RachelWhatsername. *Falling Icarus*. Deviant Art, 2011. JPEG.