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of the Real? Do any Lacanian concepts account for so much of the text that we might say the text is structured by one or more of these concepts?

Depending on the literary work in question, we might ask one or any combination of these questions. Or we might come up with a useful question not listed here. These are just some starting points to get us thinking about literary works in productive psychoanalytic ways. It is important to keep in mind that not all psychoanalytic critics will interpret the same work in the same way, even if they focus on the same psychoanalytic concepts. As in every field, even expert practitioners disagree. Our goal is to use psychoanalysis to help enrich our reading of literary works, to help us see some important ideas they illustrate that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without psychoanalysis.

The following psychoanalytic reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is offered as an example of what a psychoanalytic interpretation of that novel might yield. I will argue that fear of intimacy forms a pattern of psychological behavior that is common to all of the novel's main characters and responsible for a good deal of the narrative progression. Through a psychoanalytic lens, then, *The Great Gatsby* is not the great love story that enthalls so many of its readers, but a psychological drama of dysfunctional love.

### **"What's Love Got to Do with It?": a psychoanalytic reading of *The Great Gatsby***

One area of human behavior explored in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) that has important implications for psychoanalytic criticism is found in the romantic relationships portrayed in the novel. Indeed, even for readers not viewing the novel through a psychoanalytic lens, one of the most memorable qualities of the book is the force and endurance of Gatsby's love for Daisy, the emotional magnetism of which, for many fans, renders *The Great Gatsby* one of the great American love stories. For many nonpsychoanalytic literary critics, in fact, Jay Gatsby is a rather larger-than-life romantic hero,<sup>2</sup> quite different from the other characters portrayed in the novel. For a psychoanalytic reading, however, the interest created by the romance between Gatsby and Daisy lies not in its apparent uniqueness but in the ways in which it mirrors all of the less appealing romantic relationships depicted—those between Tom and Daisy, Tom and Myrtle, Myrtle and George, and Nick and Jordan—and thereby reveals a pattern of psychological behavior responsible for a good deal of the narrative progression. As we shall see, this pattern is grounded in the characters' fear of intimacy, the unconscious conviction that emotional ties to another human being will result in one's being emotionally devastated. This psychological problem is so pervasive in the novel that *The Great Gatsby's* famous love story becomes,

through a psychoanalytic lens, a drama of dysfunctional love. For the sake of clarity, let's begin by examining the relationship most obviously based on fear of intimacy: the marriage of Tom and Daisy Buchanan.

Perhaps the clearest indication of fear of intimacy in the novel lies in Tom Buchanan's chronic extramarital affairs, of which Jordan became aware three months after the couple's wedding. Jordan tells Nick,

I saw [Tom and Daisy] in Santa Barbara when they came back [from their honeymoon]. . . . A week after I left . . . Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers too because her arm was broken—she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel. (81–82; ch. 4)

When we meet Tom, he's engaged in his latest affair, this time with Myrtle Wilson. Dividing his interest, time, and energy between two women protects him from real intimacy with either. Indeed, Tom's relationships with women, including his wife, reveal his desire for ego gratification rather than for emotional intimacy. For Tom, Daisy represents social superiority: she's not the kind of woman who can be acquired by a "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (137; ch. 7) like Jay Gatsby. Tom's possession of Myrtle Wilson—whom Nick describes as a "sensuifous," "smouldering" woman with "an immediately perceptible vitality" (29–30; ch. 2)—reinforces Tom's sense of his own masculine power, which is why he brings her to fashionable restaurants where they are seen by his male acquaintances and why he introduces her to Nick so soon after their reunion at his East Egg home. In fact, Tom's interest in other women is so routine that Daisy has come to expect it. When Tom tells her he wants to eat supper with a group of strangers at Gatsby's party, rather than with her, because he finds one of the men amusing, she immediately realizes that her husband is pursuing another woman: she offers him her "little gold pencil" in case he wants to "take down any addresses," and "[s]he looked around after a moment and told [Nick] that the girl was 'common but pretty'" (112; ch. 6).

Daisy's fear of intimacy, though as intense as Tom's, is not quite as immediately apparent. Indeed, her marital fidelity, until her affair with Gatsby, and her distress over Tom's involvement with Myrtle might suggest to some readers that Daisy desires emotional intimacy with her husband. Jordan's description of Daisy after her honeymoon reinforces this interpretation:

I'd never seen a girl so mad about her husband. If he left the room for a minute she'd look around uneasily and say "Where's Tom gone?" and wear the most abstracted expression until she saw him coming in the door. She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight. (81–82; ch. 4)

However, the history of Tom and Daisy's relationship suggests psychological motives that point to a different interpretation of Daisy's "delight" in her husband.

It is obvious that Daisy didn't love Tom when she married him: she tried to call off the wedding the evening before when she'd received an overseas letter from Gatsby. In fact, her behavior upon receiving his letter suggests that she married Tom to keep herself from loving Gatsby, to whom she had gotten too attached for her own comfort: she got drunk for the first time in her life, and "she cried and cried. . . . [W]e . . . got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of [Gatsby's] letter. . . . [A]nd [she] only let [Jordan] leave it in the soap dish when she saw that it was coming to pieces like snow" (81; ch. 4). Why else would she marry Tom, when she obviously preferred Gatsby, who she believed was "from much the same strata as herself . . . [and] fully able to take care of her" (156; ch. 8)? Yet just three months after the wedding she seemed obsessively fond of her new husband. What happened in this short time to change Daisy's attitude so dramatically? Given Tom's compulsive pursuit of women, it is probable that by the time he and Daisy arrived in Santa Barbara, Daisy already suspected him of infidelity. This would explain why she seemed so distracted whenever Tom was out of sight. She had good reason to fear that, if he wasn't with her, he might be pursuing another woman, as she believes he was doing, for example, when she "woke up out of the ether with a totally abandoned feeling," after giving birth to Pammy, "and Tom was God knows where" (21; ch. 1). Rather than hate him for such mistreatment, however, Daisy fell head-over-heels in love with him. Although such a response may not seem to make sense, it can be explained psychologically.

In psychoanalytic terms, a woman who falls in love with a man suffering from severe fear of intimacy probably fears intimacy herself. If she fears intimacy, nothing can make her feel safer than a man who has no desire for it. Upon learning that Tom's interest did not focus exclusively on her, such a woman would have become very capable of loving him intensely because he posed no threat to her protective shell: he wouldn't have wanted to break through it even if he could have. And this is just what we see in Daisy's changed attitude toward Tom, though she certainly wouldn't use this language to describe her feelings, and it is very unlikely that she was even aware of her psychological motives.

As we learned earlier in this chapter, fear of intimacy with others is usually a product of fear of intimacy with oneself. Because close interpersonal relationships dredge up the psychological residue of earlier family conflicts and bring into play aspects of our identity we don't want to deal with or even know about, the best way to avoid painful psychological self-awareness is to avoid close interpersonal relationships, especially romantic relationships. Why not simply avoid romantic relationships altogether? Although this practice may be an effective form of avoidance for some people who fear intimacy, the psychological wounds

responsible for that fear usually demand a stage on which to reenact, in disguised form, the original wounding experience, and a romantic relationship provides an excellent stage. For example, if I was hurt by a parent who was neglectful or abusive, I will seek a mate who has these same characteristics, unconsciously hoping to fulfill whatever psychological needs were left unfulfilled by that parent. Ironically, choosing a mate who shares my parent's negative qualities almost guarantees that my unmet psychological needs will remain unmet. However, by this time in my life, due to the low self-esteem produced by my psychological wounds, I probably feel I don't deserve to have my needs met. Because the unconscious premise operating here—I wouldn't have these wounds if I were a good person—remains repressed, its illogic remains unchallenged, and I remain in its grasp.

For both Tom and Daisy, fear of intimacy is related to low self-esteem. If Tom were as emotionally secure as his wealth and size make him appear, he wouldn't work as hard as he does to impress others with his money and power, as he does, for example, when he brags about his house and stables to Nick, when he flaunts Myrtle before Nick and others, when he degrades those who don't belong to the "dominant race" (17; ch. 1), and when he toys with George Wilson concerning whether or not he will sell George a car that the poor mechanic might be able to resell at a profit. Even Tom's choice of mistresses—all from the lower class—bespeaks his need to bolster an insecure psyche through power over others.

Daisy's low self-esteem, like her fear of intimacy, is indicated in large part by her relationship with Tom. Falling so much in love with a man who was openly unfaithful to her suggests an unconscious belief that she doesn't deserve better. Furthermore, Daisy's insecurity, like Tom's, frequently requires the ego reinforcement obtained by impressing others, attempts at which we see in her numerous affectations. Nick notes her artifice when she "assert[s] her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belong" (22; ch. 1):

"I think everything's terrible anyhow. . . . Everybody thinks so—the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything." Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with thrilling scorn. . . .

The instant her voice broke off . . . I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. (22; ch. 1)

We see Daisy's affected behavior almost every time we see her in a group, as the following examples illustrate. When Nick joins the Buchanans and Jordan Baker for the first time at Daisy's Long Island home, Daisy tells him, "I'm paralyzed with happiness. . . . She laughed. . . . as if she said something very witty. . . . looking up into my face, promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had" (13; ch. 1). At Gatsby's party

she tells Nick, "If you want to kiss me any time during the evening . . . just let me know and I'll be glad to arrange it for you. Just mention my name. Or present a green card" (111; ch. 6). When Gatsby visits the Buchanans with Nick and Jordan, Daisy sends Tom out of the room, and then she "got up and went over to Gatsby, and pulled down his face kissing him on the mouth. . . . 'I don't care!' cried Daisy and began to clog on the brick fireplace" (122–23; ch. 7). Affectation is often a sign of insecurity, of which Daisy clearly has a good deal.

Tom and Daisy's fear of intimacy is apparent in their relationships with others as well. Neither of them spends time with Pammy. Their daughter is being raised by her nurse, and Daisy's artificial behavior toward the child—" 'Blessed precious,' she crooned, holding out her arms. 'Come to your own mother that loves you' " (123; ch. 7)—bespeaks, as usual, an eye for the dramatic pose rather than maternal ardor. Neither Tom nor Daisy forms close ties with Nick or Jordan, although the former is Daisy's cousin and the latter, whom Daisy has known since childhood, spends a good deal of time living under their roof. In this light, the couple's frequent relocations—as Nick puts it, they "drifted here and there unrestfully" (10; ch. 1)—are not the cause of their lack of intimacy with others, but the result: they don't stay in one place for any length of time because they don't want to become close to anyone.

It is no surprise, therefore, that Tom's relationship with Myrtle lacks intimacy. He has no desire to be close to his mistress; she is merely the means by which he avoids being close to his wife. And his treatment of Myrtle certainly suggests no deep emotional investment. He calls for her when it suits him, lies to her about Daisy's religious opposition to divorce in order to keep her from becoming inconveniently demanding, and casually breaks her nose with "a short deft movement" (41; ch. 2) when she becomes so anyway. Tom's maudlin account of his final visit to the small apartment he kept for their rendezvous, where he "sat down and cried like a baby" (187; ch. 9), suggests sentimental self-indulgence, not love. The only ballast for Tom's insensitivity to her is Myrtle's lack of real concern for him.

For Myrtle, Tom Buchanan represents a ticket out of George Wilson's garage. Through Tom, Myrtle hopes to acquire permanent membership in a world where she can display the "impressive hauteur" we see her enjoy at the party in the couple's apartment, during which "[h]er laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment" (35; ch. 2). While economic desperation, rather than fear of intimacy, is the only motive given in the novel for Myrtle's pursuit of Tom, her other relationships also suggest that she wants to avoid emotional closeness. She was apparently induced to marry George Wilson not by any personal feeling for him but by her mistaken impression that he was from a higher class than the one to which he belongs: she

"thought he was a gentleman" who "knew something about breeding," and when she learned that the good suit in which he was married was borrowed, she "cried to beat the band all afternoon" (39; ch. 2). George's complete emotional dependence on Myrtle, like his belief that the billboard eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are the eyes of God, suggests psychological disorientation rather than emotional intimacy. With a man as lost in space as George, Myrtle need not fear his getting too close. And her artificial behavior toward her sister and the McKees, apparently her only friends, indicates that these relationships provide opportunities for social display, not for intimacy.

The romance between Nick and Jordan reveals that they, too, fear intimacy. Indeed, Nick is first attracted to Jordan by her self-containment, by the image of emotional distance she projects. He refers approvingly to Jordan's apparent "complete self sufficiency" (13; ch. 1) and describes her, along with Daisy, in terms that denote the appeal of their emotional aloofness:

Sometimes [Daisy] and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire. (16-17; ch. 1)

He frequently uses words such as *insolent*, *impersonal*, *cool*, and *contemptuous* to describe what he considers the "pleasing" (23; ch. 1) expression on Jordan's face. And he remains interested in her as long as she seems to belong to a faraway world, the world of "rotogravure pictures of the sporting life at Asheville and Hot Springs and Palm Beach" (23; ch. 1), a world seemingly untouched by emotional realities. However, once the household she shares with the Buchanans becomes too emotionally "untidy," Nick beats a hasty retreat. After returning with her from the scene of Myrtle Wilson's death, he declines Jordan's invitation to keep her company in the Buchanan home: "I'd be damned if I'd go in; I'd had enough of them for one day and suddenly that included Jordan too. She must have seen something of this in my expression for she turned abruptly away and ran up the porch steps into the house" (150; ch. 7).

Nick subsequently avoids Jordan and shortly thereafter ends the relationship in a manner that keeps him emotionally insulated. He represses the memory of breaking up with her on the telephone the day after Myrtle's death—"I don't know which of us hung up with a sharp click" (163; ch. 8)—although he did "throw [her] over" (186; ch. 9), as we learn when Jordan later reminds him of the event. And even when he meets with her to discuss what had happened between them, he admits that he "talked over and around" (185; ch. 9) their shared past, implying that there was a good deal of avoidance of painful issues during the conversation.

That Nick's fear of intimacy is not limited to his relationship with Jordan is suggested by his two previous romances. Although he claims that he "wasn't even vaguely engaged" to "an old friend" (24; ch. 1) back home in Wisconsin, he admits that he came east, in part, to escape local rumors to that effect. The only way he could have been, as he puts it, "rumored into marriage" (24; ch. 1) was if the young lady in question didn't consider herself just an "old friend." We learn that she *was* more than a friend when Nick decides that, before getting involved with Jordan, "first [he] had to get [him]self definitely out of that tangle back home" (64; ch. 3). Clearly, this relationship was more serious than he cares to acknowledge, and he wants out. Similarly, in New York City he "had a short affair with a girl . . . who worked in the accounting department" at his place of business, "but her brother began throwing mean looks in [his] direction so when she went on her vacation in July [he] let it blow quietly away" (61; ch. 3). In other words, when the affair became somewhat serious, he dropped her, again in the manner most likely to avoid an emotional scene. In his relationships with women, Nick is a master of avoidance and denial.

As Jordan's "cool insolent smile" (63; ch. 3) suggests, she shares Nick's desire to remain emotionally insulated, and it is no coincidence that her career and the friends she chooses allow her to do so. Her sporting life provides a ready-made glossy image—"the bored haughty face that she turned to the world" (62; ch. 3)—to shield her from intimacy with others. "[S]he was a golf champion and everyone knew her name" (62; ch. 3), but she made sure, through various "subterfuges" (63; ch. 3), that that's all they know about her. Her choice of friends like the Buchanans, who prefer the world of social image to that of genuine emotional engagement, also protects her from intimacy. They don't want to be close any more than she does. And as Nick observes, Jordan "instinctively avoided clever shrewd men" (63; ch. 3) who might see through her charade. Surely, in choosing men like Nick, Jordan is safe from the threat of emotional ties.

Although the intense affair between Gatsby and Daisy seems to be offered as counterpoint to the Buchanans' marriage of psychological convenience, and to all the other emotionally distant relationships in the novel as well, Gatsby and Daisy's romance has striking similarities to the others. For example, Daisy has no more desire for intimacy with Gatsby than she has for intimacy with Tom. Her extramarital affair, like her earlier romance with her lover, would not have occurred had she known that Gatsby does not belong to her social class. What ever she feels for Gatsby requires the reinforcement of the same social status Tom provides. Indeed, Tom's revelation of Gatsby's social origin during their confrontation in the New York hotel room results in Daisy's immediate withdrawal:

[Gatsby] began to talk excitedly to Daisy, denying everything, defending his name against accusations that had not been made. But with every word she was drawing further and further into herself, so he gave that up

and only the dead dream fought on as the afternoon slipped away . . . struggling . . . toward that lost voice across the room.

The voice begged again to go.

"Please, Tom! I can't stand this any more."

Her frightened eyes told that whatever intentions, whatever courage she had had, were definitely gone. (142; ch. 7)

All the years of Gatsby's devotion, as well as Daisy's desire to be part of his life, disappear for her when she learns that Gatsby does not come from "the right side of the tracks." And Daisy herself disappears shortly thereafter, as she and Tom pack their bags and leave town directly after Gatsby's death the following day. Daisy doesn't realize it, but Gatsby and Myrtle function in much the same capacity for the Buchanans: as psychological pawns in their relationship with each other. Just as Tom uses Myrtle to avoid the emotional problems in his marriage, so Daisy uses Gatsby. Gatsby came along again just in time to buffer Daisy from what seems to be a new development in Tom's extramarital activities. The insistent Myrtle intrudes herself, by means of repeated telephone calls, right into Daisy's home. Tom's flaunting Myrtle out of Daisy's sight does not invade his wife's territory as does his accepting his mistress's telephone calls at home. Just because a mate's behavior has psychological payoffs for us—as Tom's affairs do for Daisy—it does not mean that those behaviors do not also give us pain. That's why psychological problems are so often referred to as *conflicts*: we unconsciously desire a particular experience because it fulfills a psychological need, but because that need is the result of a psychological wound, the experience is often painful.

Daisy's marriage has become painful, and her affair with Gatsby provides a welcome distraction. If she has Gatsby, she can tell herself that she doesn't need Tom, that she doesn't even have to think about Tom (or, better yet, she can think about how her affair with Gatsby is an appropriate punishment for Tom), and she can therefore afford the blasé attitude toward Tom's womanizing that she exhibits at Gatsby's party. Daisy's affair thus functions as a psychological defense, and as such, it underscores the psychological importance of her dysfunctional marriage: if her marriage weren't a powerful force in her life then she wouldn't have to defend against it. In fact, it is the continued unconscious importance of her marriage that finally makes Daisy feel safe enough to be with Gatsby again. As long as she remains psychologically involved with Tom, she need not fear that she will develop the kind of attachment she had to Gatsby before her marriage.

Given that Gatsby and Myrtle are psychological tokens in the Buchanans' marriage, it is symbolically significant that Tom and Daisy, in effect, kill each other's

lover. Although it is apparently a genuine accident, Daisy is the driver who kills Myrtle with Gatsby's car. Far less of an accident, surely, is Tom's sending George Wilson, armed and crazed, to Gatsby's house. Even if, from fear for his and Daisy's lives, Tom felt he had to tell Wilson that it was Gatsby who killed Myrtle (or so Tom thought), had Tom not hoped Wilson would kill his wife's lover he could have phoned Gatsby to warn him. That Daisy lets Gatsby take the blame for Myrtle's death, apparently without a second thought, indicates both her conception of him as an emotional buffer between her and the world and, once her knowledge of his social origin renders him useless as her lover, his expendability.

For many readers, perhaps the most difficult case to make for fear of intimacy is the case for Gatsby. How can we say that Gatsby fears intimacy when he is committed to Daisy as to "the following of a grail" (156; ch. 8), when he kept a scrapbook of all news items concerning her, when he remained faithful to her even during the long years of her married life, and when all the money he acquired during that time was acquired only to win Daisy back? We can make the case by examining what it is that Gatsby remains devoted to in remaining devoted to Daisy.

Although Gatsby believes that his ultimate goal is the possession of Daisy—a belief that many readers, as well as Nick, Jordan, Tom, and Daisy, seem to share—Daisy is merely the key to his goal rather than the goal itself. Gatsby had set his sights on the attainment of wealth and social status long before he knew Daisy. The boyhood "schedule" of Jimmy Gatz (Jay Gatsby's legal name)—in which the young man divided his day, in the self-improvement tradition of Ben Franklin, among physical exercise, the study of electricity, work, sports, the practice of elocution and poise, and the study of needed inventions—suggests that he'd long planned to live the "rags-to-riches" life associated with such self-made millionaires as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie.

Gatsby's desire to move up in the world resulted from his unhappy life with his impoverished parents, "shiftless and unsuccessful farm people" (104; ch. 6). And, apparently, the unhappiness of his boyhood resulted from more than his family's poverty, as is hinted when Mr. Gatz tells Nick, "He told me I et like a hog once and I beat him for it" (182; ch. 9). Whatever psychological traumas Gatsby suffered in his youth, they were sufficient to make him completely reject his emotional relationship with his parents: "his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (104; ch. 6). Thus, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Gatsby's invented past is more than just a ploy to pass himself off as a member of the upper class; it's also a form of denial, a psychological defense to help him repress the memory of his real past. And his claim that his invented family "all died and [he] came into a good deal of money" (70; ch. 4) becomes, in this context, a metaphor for his desire to psychologically kill the parents whose

wounding influence still inhabits his own psyche and, paradoxically, receive from those parents the psychological nourishment—the “money”—they’d never given him.

The financial achievements Gatsby planned for himself revealed their ultimate psychological payoff, however, only upon meeting Daisy. “She was the first ‘nice’ girl he had ever known. . . . [H]e had come in contact with such people but always with indiscernible barbed wire between” (155; ch. 8). Through Daisy, he could imagine what it would feel like to be part of her world, to be, as he felt she was, “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor” (157; ch. 8), the struggles he experienced as a youth, which he can’t help but associate with the psychological pain of that period of his life. Daisy is, for him, not a flesh-and-blood woman but an emblem of the emotional insulation he unconsciously desires: emotional insulation from himself, from James Gatz and the past to which he belongs. As we saw in the case of Tom and Daisy, the best way to achieve emotional insulation from oneself is to avoid intimacy with others. Gatsby’s outrageous idealization of Daisy as the perfect woman—she can do no wrong; she can love no one but him; time cannot change her—is a sure sign that he seeks to avoid intimacy, for it is impossible to be intimate with an ideal. In fact, we can’t even know a person we idealize because we substitute the ideal for the real human being, and that’s all we see. Even during the years when his only access to her was through the news items he read in the society pages, Gatsby’s obsession with Daisy protected him from intimacy with other women.

It is significant, then, that Fitzgerald could not imagine what went on emotionally between Gatsby and Daisy during their Long Island affair. As the author notes in a letter to Edmund Wilson, he “had no feeling about or knowledge of . . . the emotional relations between Gatsby and Daisy from the time of their reunion to the catastrophe” (*Letters* 341–42). I think it is clear, from a psychoanalytic perspective, that Fitzgerald was unable to provide us with an account of their emotional relationship because there is none. I’m not suggesting that Gatsby and Daisy don’t experience emotions, but that whatever they feel for each other is always a means of avoiding feeling the effects of something else, something profoundly disturbing that they want to keep repressed, for example, Gatsby’s unhappy youth, Daisy’s dysfunctional marriage, and both characters’ fear of intimacy.

Clearly, a psychoanalytic lens reveals a much different love story than the one ordinarily associated with *The Great Gatsby*. As the novel illustrates, romantic love is the stage on which all of our unresolved psychological conflicts are dramatized, over and over. Indeed, it’s the over-and-over, the repetition of destructive behavior, that tells us an unresolved psychological conflict is “pulling the strings” from the unconscious. All of the characters discussed above illustrate

this principle, though its operations are, at once, most dramatic and most camouflaged—that is, most repressed—in Gatsby’s obsession with Daisy. For Gatsby’s repression of his psychological motives outstrips that of all the other characters put together. His famous words “Can’t repeat the past? . . . Why of course you can!” (116; ch. 6) are especially meaningful in this context because they betoken the implicit premise on which the psychoanalytic content of the novel is based: that our repression of psychological wounds condemns us to repeatedly incur them. Gatsby’s lonely pursuit of Daisy replays the loneliness of his youth, and he seems to feel as much an outsider in the mansion he bought to receive her—the only room he uses or marks with a personal possession is his bedroom—as he must have felt in the home of his parents. Surely, Gatsby could not have been wounded more severely by his parents than he is by Daisy’s abandonment of him, both when she married Tom and when he loses her again to his rival the night of Myrtle Wilson’s death. Thus, whether it intends to do so or not, *The Great Gatsby* shows us how effectively romantic relationships can facilitate our repression of psychological wounds and thereby inevitably carry us, as the novel’s closing line so aptly puts it, “ceaselessly into the past” (189; ch. 9).

### Questions for further practice: psychoanalytic approaches to other literary works

The following questions are intended as models. They can help you use psychoanalytic criticism to interpret the literary works to which they refer or other texts of your choice. Question 5 offers a specifically Lacanian approach to literature.

1. How might an understanding of the return of the repressed help us understand the relationship of the reincarnated Beloved (who might be viewed as the embodiment of the former slaves’ unbearable pasts) to Sethe, Paul D, and the black community in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987)?
2. How might an understanding of the ways in which death work can be projected onto the environment help us interpret Marlow in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902)?
3. How might an understanding of denial and displacement (in this case, displacement of negative feelings for one’s husband onto one’s child) help us analyze the narrator’s relationship to her troubled daughter in Tillie Olsen’s “I Stand Here Ironing” (1956)?
4. How might we use an understanding of repression, the superego, and dream symbolism (especially water as a symbol of the emotions or of sexuality) to help us interpret Emily Dickinson’s “I Started Early—Took My Dog” (1862)?
5. How might we argue that the experiences of Victor, the protagonist in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), result from his nostalgia for the Imaginary