DISENCHANTING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The Interplay of Spatial and Social Mobility through Narrative Dynamic
in Fitzgerald, Steinbeck and Wolfe

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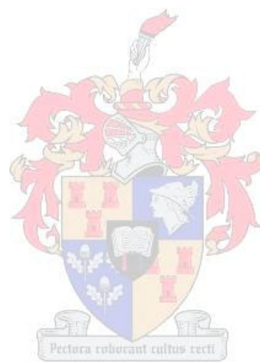

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the long-established interrelation between spatial and social mobility in the American context, the result of the westward movement across the frontier that was seen as being attended by the promise of improving one's social standing – the essence of the American Dream. The focal texts are F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940), journey narratives that all present geographical relocation as necessary for social progression. In discussing the novels' depictions of the itinerant characters' attempts at attaining the American Dream, my study draws on Peter Brooks's theory of narrative dynamic, a theory which contends that the plotting operation is a dynamic one that propels the narrative forward toward resolution, eliciting meanings through temporal progression. This thesis seeks to analyse the relation between mobility and narrative by applying Brooks's theory, which is primarily consolidated by means of nineteenth-century texts, to the modernist moment. It considers these journey narratives in view of new technological developments and economic conditions, underpinned by the process of globalisation, that impact upon mobility.

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis konsentreer op die onderlinge verband tussen ruimtelike en sosiale mobiliteit in die Amerikaanse konteks, synde die gevolg van die weswaartse beweging oor grense en grondgebiede heen wat oënskynlik aangevuur was deur die belofte van 'n beter sosiale stand – die kern van die Amerikaanse Droom. Die soeklig val in die besonder op F. Scott Fitzgerald se *The Great Gatsby* (1925), John Steinbeck se *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) en Thomas Wolfe se *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940), welke drie reisverhale almal geografiese hervestiging as 'n vereiste vir sosiale vooruitgang voorhou. In die bespreking van hoe dié romans die rondreisende karakters se strewe na die Amerikaanse Droom uitbeeld, put my studie uit Peter Brooks se teorie van narratiewe dinamiek, wat aanvoer dat die intrigefunksie dinamies is en die verhaal voortstu na ontknoping, terwyl dit deur middel van temporele progressie betekenis ontsluit. Hierdie tesis ontleed die verhouding tussen mobiliteit en die narratief deur Brooks se teorie, wat hy hoofsaaklik deur interpretasie van 19de-eeuse tekste gevorm het, op die modernistiese tydsgewrig toe te pas. Dit besin dus oor hierdie reisverhale teen die agtergrond van nuwe, globalisasie-gegronde tegnologiese ontwikkelings en ekonomiese omstandighede wat mobiliteit beïnvloed.

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INTRODUCTION

Plotting American Desire:
The Dream and Narrative Dynamic

> It is a strange thing to see with what sort of feverish ardor Americans pursue well-being and how they show themselves constantly tormented by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest route that can lead to it.
>
> The inhabitant of the United States attaches himself to the goods of this world as if he were assured of not dying, and he rushes so precipitately to grasp those that pass within his reach that one would say he fears at each instant he will cease to live before he has enjoyed them. He grasps them all without clutching them, and he soon allows them to escape from his hands so as to run after new enjoyments.
>
> In the United States, a man carefully builds a dwelling in which to pass his declining years, and he sells it while the roof is being laid; he plants a garden and he rents it out just as he was going to taste its fruits; he clears a field and he leaves to others the care of harvesting its crops. He embraces a profession and quits it. He settles in a place from which he departs soon after so as to take his changing desires elsewhere. (Tocqueville 151-52)

In *Democracy in America*, published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville's observation of the desire to find a place in which to settle instantiated a particular view of America and its citizens that has proven to have an enduring cultural currency in American narratives during the nineteenth century. Indeed, the timing of Tocqueville's claim appears serendipitous; *Democracy in America* was published contemporaneously with the work of the first recognised American novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, whose Leatherstocking tales appeared between 1823 and 1841. The protagonist, Natty Bumppo, has served as an archetype for later literary heroes, while many of the themes present in the tales, such as Natty's abandonment of civilization for the wilderness, his rejection of permanent settlement and social ties (with the exception of his Mohican companion Chingachgook), and his renaming of himself, have resurfaced throughout American literature.

The recurrence of such themes may be attributable to particular literary patterns that were established over the course of America's history, the result of attempts by writers, from the early days of the republic, to create an American epic to account for their national character. These attempts resulted in the formation of a series of interrelated myths. Richard Slotkin, who defines a mythology as "a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors" (6), explains that "[t]rue myths are generated on a sub-literary level by the historical experience of a people and thus constitute part of that inner reality which the work of the artist draws on,

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illuminates, and explains" (4). By elucidating the worldview of a nation's cultural forebears and positing the national character, myths provide structures for later writers to draw on.

One of the most common motifs identified by critics, derivative of the desire to be elsewhere, is that of movement. Leslie Fiedler suggests that since Rip van Winkle, Washington Irving's idle villager who abandons his domestic duties, "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run" (26), while Janis P. Stout characterises American literature as "a literature of movement, of motion, its great icons the track through the forest and the superhighway" (3). Stout bases her study on what she calls journey narratives, works in which either journey structures are employed or a journey (or an element thereof) is invoked as a theme. Furthermore, Stout argues that the prevalence of the journey motif is attributable to America's "journey-centered history" (5) that commenced with the migration of Europeans to the New World and their settlement of the North American continent.[1]

Movement has been a formative experience in America's past. In his 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Frederick Jackson Turner identified movement across the frontier as responsible for the development of American character; he called the frontier "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (3-4) since it enabled economic development, promoted individualism and democracy, and facilitated independence from European influence, especially with regards to social structures (30). Westward movement was thus attended by the promise of social mobility and, as a result, was regarded as liberating and promising, while western spaces were held to be loci of release and opportunity which offered Americans the chance to establish themselves. Turner also credited the frontier with establishing certain qualities, including a temperament that is individualistic (30), inquisitive, practical, resourceful and – echoing Tocqueville – restless (37), qualities he considered to be uniquely American and which he believed would endure even after the frontier had closed.

While Turner claimed that the existence of a wide expanse of "free land" was initially regarded as being "a magic fountain of youth in which America continually bathed and was rejuvenated" (qtd. in Smith 254), he wistfully announced that the frontier had closed in 1880, and considered himself to be signalling the end of the first formative epoch in American history (38). He expressed concern about the nation's future, but suggested confidently and prophetically that America, owing to its pioneering character, would direct its energy toward new frontiers:

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[1] Stout classifies journeys in American literature according to five basic categories: journeys of exploration and escape, the home-founding journey, the return (which relates to homecoming either locally or to the cultural home, Europe), the quest and homeless wandering. She characterises the wave of migrations that marks the establishment of America as incorporating journeys of exploration, escape and home-founding (30). Other works that focus on the tradition of journeys in American literature include William C. Spengemann, *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and Sam Bluefarb, *The Escape Motif in the American Novel: Mark Twain to Richard Wright* (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1972).

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> That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom – these are the traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier. Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise. But never again will such gifts as free land offer themselves. (37)

Turner's words helped to transform the frontier into a symbolic space for American progress; the West acquired a particular "genius of Place," as D. H. Lawrence terms the unique quality which informs particular behaviours and attitudes (16). Indeed, the opportunity associated with the West helped to establish a principle that holds social mobility to be an especially achievable project within the American context. The term "American Dream" gained currency after the publication of Henry Truslow Adams's *The Epic of America* in 1931 in which he claimed that

> there has been also the *American dream*, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. […] It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (415, original emphasis)

For Adams, the Dream manifested not only in material but also societal terms and its realisation depended on whatever the citizen made of his inherent potential. In tracing the development of the concept from the arrival of the Pilgrims to the present day, Jim Cullen demonstrates that the Dream does not embody one particular vision but that it has had several instantiations throughout history – denoting either political, religious, or socio-economic advancement – and that while the term itself appears to be relatively recent, the notion of mobility as particularly achievable in the American context has existed from the nation's discovery. The Dream resonates with Tocqueville's identification of the American's desire to make a place for himself. Implicit in this concept of mobility, therefore, is the notion of agency – according to Cullen, the cornerstone of the American Dream (10), since the American is seen to have the capacity to establish himself of his own accord.

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The ostensible realm of possibility in which Americans exist established a particular perspective on the national character. French-American writer Crèvecoeur dubbed the American a "new man" (43), while the congressman Henry Clay introduced the concept of the "self-made man" when, in 1832, he identified America as "a nation of self-made men" (Cullen 69). R. W. B. Lewis, drawing on Crèvecoeur, argued that the American is a figure of great potential, his limitless possibility a result of his emancipation from history and the inheritances of ancestry; self-reliant, he stands on the brink of a new history and is conceived of in prelapsarian terms as a new Adam (5). All conceptions of him emphasised the American's originality, a quality he owed to his assumed disassociation from the past. Upon arriving in the New World, immigrants entered a new physical as well as social realm in many ways lacking the established institutions present in the societies from which they came, such as legal, religious and military ones.

America was therefore also conceptualised as being devoid of the class distinctions present in older civilizations. As Eric Lott indicates, class as an analytical category is relatable to concepts like "station" and "status" and implies associations to properties such as "value" and "respectability" ("Class"). Contrary to European countries with their long-established feudal and monarchical legacies, America started off with no fixed class allocations for its new citizens (Lott). America was thus seen as being devoid of what Eric Olin Wright defines as class structure, that is, the structural foundation upon which classes are formed (124). Although in my discussions it will emerge that the reality of America's relationship with class is much more complex than these claims might at first suggest, in theory the nation was seen as a land with extensive opportunity for social mobility.

Roughly a century after Tocqueville published his observations of American life, his claim that Americans are doomed to ongoing movement in pursuit of their desires being fulfilled was echoed in three American novels of the interwar period in which the protagonists depart from their individual places of origin in quest of the American Dream: In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby leave their Midwestern origins to settle on the East Coast; John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) sees the Joad family move westward to California in search of a new homestead; and Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940) depicts George Webber's desire both for fame and for a way to give his literary material form that sees him abandon first his hometown for the city and then all of America for Europe. Webber's move to Europe engages the counter-movement of the early twentieth century in which many American writers participated. Reasons for moving varied; some, such as members of the Lost Generation, were disillusioned after the war and felt alienated from their homeland, while others sought the presence of a richer, older culture that America, with its recent cultural past, could not

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offer. This thesis, then, brings into focus an important period in the development of this mythology by considering how the quests that seek social progression are engaged in literary narratives of the interwar years in ways that challenge its core assumptions.

This period during which writers were moving quite extensively, both within America and across the Atlantic, coincides with the advent of literary modernism and witnessed the revisiting of socio-cultural myths in literature. Among the common mythic tropes that writers engaged with were the social and cultural contrasts between Eastern and Western life. For instance, Stephen Crane's 1899 short story "The Blue Hotel," in which the garish Palace Hotel is looked down upon by Eastern travellers who pass through the Nebraskan prairie town by train, concerned preconceptions of the West as being less sophisticated than the East and preoccupied with violence. In contrast, Owen Wister's 1902 novel, *The Virginian*, portrayed the East as representing civilization, established institutions but also outdated values; the West, by contrast, was free of legacies and fostered independence, enterprise and moral strength. It was also during this period that America began to assert its position on the global stage by way of its foreign policy, particularly under the governance of Theodore Roosevelt, a friend of Wister's and an admirer of his work, who drew heavily on the westering spirit. America was determined, as Roosevelt put it, "to swallow up all adjoining nations who were too weak to withstand [it]" (qtd. in Beale 72). During his governance, America was involved in the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines, the Spanish-American War, the construction of the Panama Canal and worldwide naval travel.

The state of American politics and the extent of global travel during the early twentieth century are attributable to developments during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a period during which mobility became a fundamental feature of social and economic life. "Change was the name of the nineteenth century," writes historian E. J. Hobsbawm, and it manifested most noticeably in developed countries in the form of technology and the resultant proliferation of material production and increased communication (26): locomotion, steamships, automobiles, aeronautics and telegraphy became more common. The social landscape was becoming significantly industrialised and, consequently, more urbanised, with many moving to the city, the new centre of labour (116). In addition to more movement within countries, international travel was also becoming easier, quicker and more widespread, in part due to empire building (Hobsbawm indeed christens the period 1875-1914 the "age of empire") but also due to state rivalry (51), which all contributed to an increasingly globalised world.

However, in addition to new opportunities for mobility, a globalised world is, as Zygmunt Bauman contends, one in which there are new conditions surrounding mobility. While Bauman's focus is a postmodern world, the developments he identifies can be seen as having been precipitated by preceding centuries. He argues that a globalised world is not only one which allows a greater

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sense of unity, but also one which divides. Movement, whether physical or not, becomes an inevitable fate for all (77) – the human condition is now characterised by "time-space compression" (2) – but mobility becomes the "main stratifying factor" (3), dividing members of society according to their freedom to determine their destinations (86). Bauman distinguishes between those "high up" and those "low down" (86), that is, "the globally mobile" and "the locally tied" (88). When they are on the move, Bauman dubs them "tourists" and "vagabonds" (92) respectively. For tourists, spatial restrictions are nonexistent (88); hence, they move at will and for pleasure (89) and reap the benefits of a globalised world (93). The movement of the wealthy, who are not restricted spatially, secures the flow of time, so that they "live in a perpetual present" (88), insulated from the past and future.

By contrast, vagabonds' mobility is a manifestation not of freedom, but rather the absence thereof (92). Subjected to the changes brought on by globalisation, they seldom move, but when they do, movement is frequently imposed on them (92). Forced out from where they would choose to remain and unable to remain anywhere for long, space is limited for the vagabond since they lack options (89), are often unwelcome (92) and have to travel surreptitiously (89). Their time seems to stand still (88), for their conditions seem unchanging; with no control over it (88), time weighs them down (93). Bauman's differentiation between the mobility of the wealthy and the poor suggests that the interplay between spatial and social mobility is measurable by the ways in which time and space operate.

Since time – the unfolding thereof – correlates with development, there has been a longstanding connection between travel and narrative. Given that both journeys and narratives unfold in time, the journey in literature might be considered, as Northrop Frye has claimed, "the one formula that is never exhausted" (57). "The narrative potential of travel," explains Kai Mikkonen, "lies in the fact that we recognize in it temporal and spatial structures that call for narration. The different stages of travel – departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return – provide any story with a temporal structure that raises certain expectations of things to happen" (286). The connection to travel dates back to the earliest narratives. Fictional journeys have frequently gained inspiration from earlier real journeys that were passed on through oral narratives; biblical and classical traditions made use of journeys, both literal and figurative, with the journey often emerging as a symbol of the progression of life.

The American literary tradition, to a large extent, stems from this relationship between travel and writing. Puritan settlers like William Bradford explicitly invoked the account of the Children of Israel journeying to the Promised Land as well as the Aeneïd as models to chronicle and

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interpret their own journey (Stout 12).[2] Columbus, too, was working with earlier narrative models when penning accounts of his journey to the New World; these are similarly permeated with biblical imagery. Furhermore, as Howard Mumford Jones indicates, the belief that unlimited riches lie in a new land to the west is an ancient theme in Europe, present in classical literature (4). This interrelation between travel and narrative persisted during the modernist period, facilitated by global travel. Helen Carr, who has examined the relation between empire building and travel narratives, contends that the period between 1880 and 1940, during which the British Empire flourished (71), produced a significant number of travel narratives and, because this was also a time of increased tourism, many writers who were not travel writers per se were nevertheless on the move (73). These developments, of course, suggest that globalisation may impact on the character of journey narratives.

The correspondence between travel and writing applies not only to structure but also content. As Michel Butor asserts in his essay "Travel and Writing," reading allows one to journey by retreating into another world and one's eyes follow an itinerary in moving from one sign to the next as the narrative progresses (54). Butor is suggesting a dynamic experience of narrative; the reader moves through the narrative and is moved along by it. In an attempt to engage with texts that represent an interplay between spatial and social mobility, Butor's claim that narratives rely on some form of movement offers a point of departure for analysing journey narratives (as defined by Stout) and points to Peter Brooks's theory of narrative dynamic that posits a relationship of reciprocity between form and content, claiming an interest in "the ways in which the narrative texts themselves appear to represent and reflect their own plots" (xii). Brooks is concerned, first, with plot and the operation of plotting, which relates to how narratives come to be ordered in particular forms and, second, with the readers' desire for such ordering (xi).

Brooks developed his theory with the idea that models for understanding narrative structure proposed by structuralists, particularly those derivative of the French field of narratology, were "excessively static and limiting" due to their reductive paradigmatic focus on minimal units and their subsequent ignorance of the temporal dimension in narrative, that is, the role of time in shaping meanings (xiii). For Brooks, time is crucial since plot, which he defines as "the design and intention of narrative, what shapes a story and gives it a certain direction or intent of meaning" (xi), develops its meanings only through temporal progression (12). Thus plots remain structures but

[2] For a discussion on the development of New World travel writing and its dependence on earlier models, see Spengemann 6-67, and Howard Mumford Jones, *O Strange New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1964) 4-8, and for the development of written narratives from oral traditions, see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) 17-56.

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they are "intentional structures, goal-orientated and forward-moving" (12), and what sets them in motion is the existence of textual energy.

Drawing on Freud's notion of Eros, a polymorphous concept referring not merely to sexual desire but more broadly to the life instinct, Brooks proposes the concept of narrative desire and asserts that it is twofold: it refers to the force that takes the reader through narrative, his desire and expectation of understanding that makes him wish for the end, as well as referring to the initiatory circumstance that causes a story to take place. "Desire," Brooks argues, "is always there at the start of a narrative, often in a state of initial arousal, often having reached a state of intensity that movement must be created, action undertaken, change begun" (38). Plotting makes use of desire by eliciting meanings throughout the narrative by relying on a temporal structure. Plotting is "the activity of shaping, with the dynamic aspect of narrative – that which makes a plot 'move forward,' and makes us read forward, seeking in the unfolding of the narrative a line of intention and a portent of design that hold the promise of progress toward meaning" (xiii). Put differently, plotting is a process of structuration (10) that utilises time as the medium for shaping meanings (xiv), since it takes time to move through narrative. The plotting operation can thus be seen to discipline time. In reference to journey narratives, this dynamic aspect that is tasked with the purpose of eliciting meaning through temporal succession, can be seen as redemptive movement. Such movement will, as Brooks argues, "wrest" meanings "from human temporality" (xi), order so that the complete narrative coheres, and, as Dawid de Villiers points out, elicit meanings from what would otherwise be mere succession (43).

Brooks explains further that as one progresses through the narrative, the story develops and the initial conflict is worked through. Plots accomplish this progress by connecting incidents and episodes that we encounter as we move through the text (5); these operate as resistances that the plot needs to work through (92). These resistances correspond to the obstacles that traditional questers encounter along the road and seek to overcome. As Northrop Frye explains, "the successful quest" (187) is structured around three stages:

> the stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which either the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero. We may call these three stages respectively, using Greek terms, the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero, even if he does not survive the conflict. (187)

The quest format is thus a template for narrative structuration, which indicates that narrative requires a set of resistances to be worked through in order for its structure to emerge, and is as such

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a pattern we may recognise in a vast range of narratives that do not in any overt sense have anything to do with the quest as such.

Resistances function to frustrate the reader's desire to discover meaning, allowing the end to be experienced as the appropriate or proper one (104). Employing Freud's description of the progression of organic life in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a "masterplot" (96) for the operation of narrative, Brooks likens the competing desires for meaning and suspense to the competing forces of the death-instinct and the pleasure principle, a tension that ensures that the ending is not reached too quickly – a phenomenon Brooks terms a "short-circuit" (102). The proper end is one reached more pleasurably through at least minimal detours, a delay which makes the narrative middle a "field of force" (47), a "dilatory space" as Roland Barthes calls it (qtd. in Brooks 92). Brooks refers to it variously as indirection, delation, detour, the "swiggle" toward the end (104), the space of retardation, postponement, error, and partial revelation; it is essentially "the place of transformation: where the problems posed to and by initiatory desire are worked out and worked through" (92). While these "binding" (101) moments – textual junctures where initiatory desire is partially satisfied – retard motion, they also propel the plot forward by creating anticipations of what will follow as one progresses toward the end. Narrative dynamic is therefore characterised by alternations between suspense and resolution.

Ultimately, though, desire is teleological (104) and narratives always seek totalisation (91). This relates to the quest's attainment of *anagnorisis* and the reader's search for totalising meaning. "If the motor of narrative is desire, totalizing, building ever-larger units of meaning," Brooks writes, "the ultimate determinants of meaning lie *at the end*, and narrative desire is ultimately, inexorably, desire *for* the end" (52, original emphases). Providing support for his view of the significance of the narrative end, Brooks quotes Walter Benjamin's claim that "[d]eath [...] is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell" (22), as well as drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre's view that we read back from the end (22) and Barthes's idea that reading is always in terms of the ending (48). The end is seen to have structuring force; it sheds retrospective light. Episodes in the middle only have meaning retrospectively, "in a reading back from the end" (29). Incidents are read as "promises and annunciations," moments in the text at which meaning is partially elucidated in anticipation of a resolved ending (93), with "the anticipation of retrospection" (23). It is only because of the structuring force of the end that time can shape meaning throughout the textual middle; without this capacity, this narrative dynamic, the narrative beginning and incidents encountered in the middle would be meaningless (93). The end provides the closure that we seek in reading, the sense that whatever conflict is posed at the narrative start has been resolved, an experience which Brooks relates to the "authority" conferred by the deathbed scenes so common in nineteenth-century novels (94).

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Brooks's understanding of the plotting operation is elaborated in terms of the nineteenth-century narrative tradition. He asserts that our capacity to recognise plot derives from the nineteenth century, a "golden age of narrative" during which writers and readers of varied fields such as literature, philosophy and history conceived of plot as a necessary way of ordering and interpreting the world, one that helped to comprehend how "human life acquired meaning" (xii). They thus conceived of particular types of knowledge to be understandable, and thus explainable, only sequentially (xi-xii). But with the advent of modernism, Brooks contends, we encounter a "crisis" in our plots and plotting (283), and it is this dimension of his argument that renders it particularly valuable from the point of view of my own consideration of the modernist moment in relation to journey narratives. According to Brooks, narratives in the modernist moment are characterised by "suspicion toward plots" derived, perhaps, from "an overelaboration of and overdependence on plots in the nineteenth century" (7). Modernists are "more acutely aware of [plots'] artifice, their arbitrary relation to time and chance, though we still depend on elements of plotting, however ironized or parodied, more than we realize" (xii). The result is that modernist literary narratives produce a disjuncture between form and content, between the narrative trajectory from the described progression, so that the crisis manifests as a loss of faith in authoritative structures.

Brooks illustrates this crisis in a discussion of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a quintessentially modernist novel (written in 1899) that he considers as exemplifying the manner in which the modernist era is characterised by unresolved endings. Brooks claims that the novel "poses in an exemplary way central questions about the shape and epistemology of narrative. It displays an acute self-consciousness about the organizing features of traditional narrative, working with them still, but suspiciously, with constant reference to the inadequacy of the inherited orders of meaning" (238). Conrad's novel bears some resemblance to the nineteenth-century detective novel, a genre Brooks uses to demonstrate the technical and thematic overlap present in nineteenth-century narrative, which is manifested by the following and retrieval by one, the detective, of the story of another, the perpetrator. Conrad's novel is similar in that Marlow attempts to retrieve the story of Kurtz – he seeks in Kurtz's plot a means of authorising his own story. Kurtz cannot provide his own story, while Marlow lies to Kurtz's Intended, so that the framed structure limits our ability to fully comprehend either Marlow or Kurtz. Marlow's account, always subject to the possibility of a retelling or revision, actively resists totalising meaning. There is now a disjuncture between narrative and its organisation, and the result is an unresolved ending.

Unresolved endings are what connect the quests in *The Great Gatsby*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. Each novel concludes without the protagonists reaching their desired ends; they either abandon the Dream, it eludes them right to the end, or they redirect their desires toward different aspirations. Tocqueville may be seen as having predicted that Americans

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are doomed to the unresolved narrative ends and the subsequent deferral of meaning characteristic of modernist narratives. Brooks's positing of the existence of narrative desire that propels plot echoes Tocqueville's claim that desire is initiatory of movement. Moreover, Brooks's understanding of narrative dynamic, with its contending desires for dilation and resolution, resonates with the movement of Tocqueville's American who, in pursuit of a series of attainments, is subject to an ongoing cycle of movement and resettlement. Initiatory desire is also relatable to the changed state of affairs hoped to be realised at an appointed destination, the place where the Dream is to be realised. Brooks's conception of narrative desire, its developments through time, its suggestions of movement and binding, therefore offers a way of engaging with the issue of mobility in the novels under consideration because it allows us to measure the progress of the itinerant characters.

In order to measure characters' attempts at progressing socially, the theory of narrative dynamic will be combined with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope.[3] Bakhtin defines the chronotope, which translates literally as "time-space," as the "interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (84). The chronotope structures the representation of events in the novel by concretising the temporal dimension within a delineated spatial dimension: "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). Concerning the significance of chronotopes for narrative, Bakhtin asserts that

> [t]hey are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. […] An event can be communicated, it becomes information, one can give precise data on the place and time of its occurrence. […] It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing forth, the representability, of events. (250)

Narrative knots are the points where temporal progression can be registered, where textual energy is bound; moments in the text where temporal shifts are measurable. Since Bakhtin holds that temporal progression in narrative is measurable through space, the chronotope may contribute to the plotting operation by superimposing a spatial topography upon the narrative's temporal structure. This enables the showing forth of particular junctures at which initiatory desire is worked through and which correspond to places in the text through which the characters move. In other words, the chronotopic will prove useful in measuring the progress – brought about by narrative time – that

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[3] For comprehensive explanations of the chronotope, see Nele Bemong et al, *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Academia Press, 2010).

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may attend characters' geographical movement as the plot advances. As the intersection between time and space, the chronotope offers a way of relating Brooks and Bauman, since Bauman's differentiation between the mobility of the wealthy and the poor implies that social mobility is measurable by changing *topoi*.

The chronotope will give a synchronic reading of the state of affairs because it denotes a delineated domain of experience. "All contexts are shaped fundamentally by the kind of time and space that operate within them," argue Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson; "a chronotope is a way of understanding experience; it is a specific form-shaping ideology for understanding the nature of events and actions. […] Actions are necessarily preformed in a specific context; chronotopes differ by the ways in which they understand context and the relation of actions and events to it" (367). They add that "time and space vary in *qualities*; different social activities and representations of those activities presume different kinds of time and space" (367, original emphasis). Thus the chronotope is also suitably applicable to the disjuncture between structure and meaning recognisable in modernist narratives. As the nexus of mobility and narrative dynamic, it offers a way of looking at a particular moment in the text and to register the state of affairs by considering how, within the parameters of a particular *topos*, narrative temporality operates and what implications for plot are produced thereby. The interface of *topos* and temporality, for plot to progress, should allow narrative time to shape desire toward resolution at the *topoi* appointed as the journeys' ends.

My intention in taking up *The Great Gatsby*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *You Can't Go Home Again* as the focal texts is to explore different treatments of narratives of redemptive movement as subjected to conditions impacting upon mobility during the early part of the twentieth century: that is, to consider what becomes of social mobility in the wake of the closing of the frontier, with particular focus on the period leading up to the Great Depression and its aftermath. Chapter One, "'A Story of the West': Retracing the Irredeemable Past in *The Great Gatsby*," examines narrator Nick Carraway's attempt to explain the rise of Jay Gatsby, the mysterious parvenu with the questionable past who lives next door. In his path from modest beginnings to tremendous wealth, Jay Gatsby's mobility has resonances with the frontier experience, although Fitzgerald employs revisionist views thereof, and inverts the direction of the mythic journey by moving his characters from west to east. In Nick's account, given two years after his return to the Midwest, he looks back from Gatsby's death – his *real* end – in view of Gatsby's *desired* end – reunion with Daisy Buchanan – and traces Gatsby's journey to West Egg back to his North Dakota origins, accounting for pivotal moments that explain Gatsby's social progression. Since Gatsby's mobility is the cause of much suspicion and disdain on the part of Nick, the latter's account raises a number of questions,

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including why he would decide to settle Gatsby's story, and why, given his own aspirations and the fact that his relocation was intended to be a permanent one, Gatsby's death should send him back home to the Midwest.

Nick's acquiescent journey east, a result of his post-war alienation, and the unending movement he encounters in the city, captures the restlessness and decadence that characterised the decade Fitzgerald dubbed the "Jazz Age," an era that saw "[a] whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure" ("Echoes" 132). The mobility engendered by the era was in great measure attributable to the First World War since it was after the war that America emerged as economically steady. Of course, the war also impacted the national state of mind, an effect that would imprint itself on the literature of the day. Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury point out that, since many established and emergent American writers were involved in the war, either in combat or in various corps, the war became "a cut-off point from the past, an ultimate symbol for the dawn of modernity" (230). Both in his life and in his fiction, Fitzgerald came to exemplify the nineteen-twenties, but like Nick who sees his position as "within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled" (40), Fitzgerald appears to have felt a similar ambivalence towards social mobility.

This ambivalence stemmed from Fitzgerald's middle-class Midwestern background that set him apart during his time spent in the East at Princeton, where he attempted to assimilate into polite society. According to his biographer, Matthew J. Bruccoli, it was during this time in the East that Fitzgerald "stopped thinking of himself as a Midwesterner" (*Epic Grandeur* 47). Years later, when he began to receive recognition in New York City, Fitzgerald would write that "[t]o my bewilderment I was adopted not as a Middle Westerner, […] but as the very archetype of what New York wanted" ("Lost City" 109). However, the initial assimilation into polite society was not easy. As with Gatsby questing for Daisy, Fitzgerald endured a disappointing pursuit of the daughter of a wealthy Chicago family, Genevra King, while Zelda Sayre, who eventually became his wife, only accepted his proposal after the success of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*. His experiences provided Fitzgerald with a theme that would resurface throughout his career, as he later wrote: "a poor boy in a rich town; a poor boy in a rich boy's school; a poor boy in a rich man's club at Princeton…. I have never been able to forgive the rich for being rich, and it has coloured my entire life and works" (qtd. in Stern 164). He explains further that "the whole idea of Gatsby is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money. This theme comes up again and again because I lived it" (qtd. in Stern 164). As a result, Fitzgerald's oeuvre seems dominated by plots of young, ambitious men, and his most common themes are those of class and mobility.

Furthermore, the protagonists' aspirations for social mobility are often fused with romantic love. In his short story "Winter Dreams" (1922) – which Fitzgerald identified as "[a] sort of first

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draft of the Gatsby idea" in a letter to Maxwell Perkins (*A Life* 121) – Judy Jones is Dexter Green's equivalent of Daisy Buchanan: "her casual whim gave a new direction to his life" (224) and "[n]o illusion as to the world in which she had grown up could cure his illusion as to her desirability" (228). Like Gatsby, Dexter undergoes drastic progression from poverty to wealth and success, and both their lives are concerned with desired outcomes: "My career is largely a matter of futures" (226), Dexter claims. Oddly, his aspirations for the future are dominated by his past, for Judy moves on, leaving Dexter to long for a version of her from years earlier. This is, of course, the same problem Gatsby faces, and his quest is essentially one to redeem the past. Indeed, the struggle between aspirations for the future and the unalterable impact of the past is a theme Fitzgerald felt prevalent in his own life and work, as he expressed in "The Crack-Up":

> [T]he test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise. […] I must hold in balance the sense of the futility of effort and the sense of the necessity to struggle; the conviction of the inevitability of failure and still the determination to 'succeed' – and, more than these, the contradiction between the dead hand of the past and the high intentions of the future. (139-40)

In an attempt to recapture the past, Gatsby quests for wealth and success – the novel is about this *journey*; indeed, one of the original titles Fitzgerald considered was *On the Road to West Egg*. Fitzgerald's depictions of young ambitious men are frequently compared to the formulaic "rags-to-riches" tales of Horatio Alger, but what is not frequently recognised in Fitzgerald criticism is that the author was strongly influenced by medieval writing,[4] an indication of his familiarity with traditional quests. Gatsby, having "committed himself to the following of a grail" (156), is a supreme quester, a man with a long-term goal that he plots thoroughly and to which he commits himself uncompromisingly right to the end. Gatsby's quest proves to be ritualistic and chivalric, and Fitzgerald's indebtedness to the quest romance genre is clear. Yet the elusiveness of the Dream also indicates Fitzgerald's adherence to the modernist approach to endings, attributable, in part, to his acknowledged indebtedness to T. S. Eliot, whose *Waste Land* has several resonances in the novel – depicted in the moral sterility and purposeless wandering of modern city life – and Joseph Conrad, whose narrative technique in works such as *Heart of Darkness* may have provided a model for Nick as narrator.

[4] Jerome Mandel indicates that Fitzgerald compared himself to knights in his notebooks (541). Mandel further speculates that the appeal of the romance mode may have been that it is an aristocratic genre (544).

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While Fitzgerald's novel depicts the great material excesses of the nineteen-twenties, Steinbeck's Dust Bowl narrative is often seen as the most accurately representative literary work of the nineteen-thirties in America. Chapter Two, "'A Little Piece of Land': The Problem of Settlement in *The Grapes of Wrath*," looks at the Joads' trip to California, encouraged by the image of the western state as a "lan' of milk an' honey" (251). Having departed from the destroyed farmland in Oklahoma, their quest is plotted along Route 66, "the path of a people in flight" (118), as they search for a family-size farm. As part of a larger migration, the Joad party's journey comprises several individual dreams and registers varying degrees of commitment to the central aim. The chapter considers their movement in view of the fact that, as tenant farmers, the Joads have a material relation to place which drastically influences their attempt to establish themselves elsewhere, in part because it constitutes a particular notion of identity and land ownership. With this strong attachment to place in mind, the chapter explores the way in which property rights (rather than familial ties to the land) problematise the Joads' attempts to take root in California.

In Steinbeck's fiction, California is frequently the seat of the American Dream. Steinbeck himself originated from California, from an agricultural village in Salinas where he spent parts of his youth working on ranches, becoming familiar with the lives of migrants, experiences that would no doubt have contributed to his interest in the plight of tenant farmers during the Depression. A drastic change from Fitzgerald's affluent twenties, the thirties witnessed a global economic crisis that resulted in a decade of anxiety and widespread unemployment, a time during which many writers consciously focused on social issues of the day. Steinbeck was among the writers who turned to political concerns in his fiction and has since frequently been viewed as a proletarian writer. Political consciousness aside, California established another common component in Steinbeck's fiction: the influence of place. His work frequently opens with a description of a natural environment before his characters are introduced, and they often have strong affiliations to the land; one thinks, for instance, of Lennie's well-known expression of his wish to "live off the fatta the lan'" (16) in *Of Mice and Men*.

Moreover, Steinbeck frequently sends his characters on a journey, and thereby often explores the confrontation between places as imagined and their reality as encountered.[5] The occurrence of the journey theme in his fiction could be related to his literary influences; like Fitzgerald, Steinbeck was influenced by medieval writing, while biblical themes emerge prominently in some works. Steinbeck was also heavily influenced by history and was keenly aware of American myths; one could argue that his fiction appears to trace America's historical experience

[5] For a development of Steinbeck's treatment of the confrontation between the reality of places and the ways in which characters envision them, see Louis Owens, "A Garden of My Land: Landscape and Dreamscape in John Steinbeck's Fiction," *Steinbeck Quarterley* 23.3-4 (1990): 78-88.

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– themes include westering, as recalled, for instance, by Jody's grandfather in *The Red Pony*, and settlement in *To a God Unknown* and *East of Eden*, in which Adam Trask's first name embodies the American desire "to make a garden of my land" (170). When America experienced the Dust Bowl, Steinbeck fictionalised that too, in *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Common among many of these works is the desire to find a better life elsewhere, a quality that Steinbeck admired greatly in his countrymen.

Indeed, Steinbeck considered restless movement to be quintessentially American. In *Travels with Charley* (subtitled *In Search of America*, and originally published in *Holiday* as "In Quest of America"), Steinbeck set off on his own journey and chronicled his attempt to rediscover the nation that had been the focal subject throughout his career. In a letter to his third wife, Elaine, during this time, Steinbeck commented on the trailer parks emerging throughout the country and reckoned that "[i]f I ever am looking for a theme – this restless mobility is a good one" (*Letters* 684). Of the people he meets at Sag Harbor, he writes, in a curious modification of Tocqueville's observations that

> I saw in their eyes something I was to see over and over in every part of the nation – a burning desire to go, to move, to get under way, any place, away from Here. They spoke quietly of how they wanted to go someday, to move about, free and unanchored, not toward something but away from something. I saw this look and heard this yearning everywhere in every state I visited. Nearly every American hungers to move. (*Travels* 684)

In a manner that is still more reminiscent of Tocqueville's view, Steinbeck noted in another work of non-fiction, *America and Americans,* that restlessness transpires even in the midst of favourable conditions. "One of the generalities most often noted about Americans is that we are restless," he writes, "a dissatisfied, a searching people. We bridle and buck under failure, and we go mad with dissatisfaction in the face of success. We spend our time searching for security, and hate it when we get it" (29). Of course, Steinbeck's awareness of the American desire to be elsewhere raises the question of how he would treat tenants' attempts at mobility given that, from the very beginning, the Joads' movement has been determined for them, especially given his aim of subjecting his fiction, as he did in *The Grapes of Wrath*, to historical veracity. The novel essentially explores Steinbeck's treatment of the myths of California as America's Promised Land as it confronts his aim of a realistic depiction of conditions of the Dust Bowl.

While Fitzgerald's and Steinbeck's novels are situated within clearly defined eras, the prosperous nineteen-twenties and the Great Depression, Wolfe's story overlaps with both eras, spanning the years between 1929 and 1936. Chapter Three, "'We've Gone Places We Didn't Mean to Go':

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Misdirected Desire in *You Can't Go Home Again*," looks at Wolfe's alter ego protagonist George Webber in his quest for fame. It considers this desire as it confronts what Webber sees as the artist's duty, which is to produce work that reflects, "as all honest fiction must […] the stuff of human life" (26), and how the two forces compel Webber to continually abandon one location for another. Webber moves relatively alone throughout several locations, in which he encounters the ways of life of people representing various segments of society in search of a place that would welcome him as a famous writer. His observations, as they influence his own journeys, allow one to consider not only the mobility of the individual hero but also the collective mobility of classes. That Webber's extensive travels take him between New York City and his hometown of Libya Hill, North Carolina, as well as to London and Berlin, demonstrates a more comprehensive acknowledgement of developments in the early twentieth century than Fitzgerald's and Steinbeck's novels.

Globalisation is one example; Webber travels quite readily between America and Europe. Another is urbanisation. Wolfe was a writer concerned with both provincial and metropolitan life, and his work can be seen to partake in a tradition in early twentieth-century American literature which Carl van Doren termed "the revolt from the village" (295), referring to the trend among many writers to depict characters moving from the small town to the city. Like Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* and "My Lost City," Wolfe envisioned the city as the place to realise dreams; "[t]here is no truer legend in the world than the one about the country boy, the provincial innocent, in his first contact with the city" (*The Web* 258), he wrote. As with George Webber, Wolfe's own wanderlust and desire for fame took him away from his hometown, Asheville, North Carolina, but it resurfaced as Altamont in his first two novels, *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, and as Libya Hill in his final two novels, both published posthumously, *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. His editor, Maxwell Perkins, opined that "no one could understand Thomas Wolfe who had not seen or properly imagined the place in which he was born and grew up" (87). Still, Perkins asserted that Wolfe's focus was all of America. "He was always thinking of America as a whole," wrote Perkins,

> and planning trips to some part that he had not yet seen, and in the end taking them. His various quarters in town always looked as if he had just moved in, to camp for a while. This was partly because he really had no interest in possessions of any kind, but it was also because he was in his very nature a far Wanderer, bent upon seeing all places, and his rooms were just necessities into which he never settled. Even when he was there his mind was not. He needed a continent to range over, actually and in imagination. And his place was all America. It was with America that he was most deeply concerned […]. ("Thomas Wolfe" 88)

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That concern intensified as the country entered the Depression years. Wolfe was deeply affected by the market crash that links Fitzgerald's era to Steinbeck's, when, as Fitzgerald claimed, "the ten-year period that, as if reluctant to die outmoded on its bed, leapt to a spectacular death in October 1929" ("Echoes" 130). In "Writing and Living," a lecture delivered at Purdue University in 1938, Wolfe explained that

> [m]any people see in the last great war a kind of great dividing line in their own lives – a kind of great tale of two worlds, a world before the War, and a world after the War; but in my own experience, if I had to write my own tale of two worlds, I think I should be more inclined to use 1929 as the dividing line. (510)

A pivotal event in his own life, the crash was also a pivotal moment in the novel, and Wolfe's words acknowledge that his fiction was often grounded in real events. Wolfe's aim – "Write the idea of America" as he scribbled in a notebook in 1925 (qtd. in Everton 37) – was to portray an all-embracing image of experience of America. His scope was epic and it has seen him frequently likened to Walt Whitman. However, it earned Wolfe many detractors, who argued that the voluminous form demonstrated his lack of artistic technique, particularly in comparison to other prominent writers of his day like Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, who were more selective about their writing; critics claimed Wolfe's works lacked unity and form or structure (McElderry 103; Wagenknecht 410; Bishop 9). In a particularly scathing review, "Genius is Not Enough," Bernard de Voto accused Wolfe of having to rely on Perkins to edit his manuscripts and shape them into novels.[6]

The form of Wolfe's novels may be attributable to his reliance on real life, an approach he deemed imperative to his fiction. As a result, his work has often been dubbed "autobiographical fiction," a classification he disagreed with. While he concedes in his address to the reader in the preface to *Look Homeward, Angel* that the material "was once the fabric of his [the writer's] life" and that "[i]f any reader, therefore, should say that the book is 'autobiographical' the writer has no answer for him" but contends that "all serious work in fiction is autobiographical – that, for instance, a more autobiographical work than 'Gulliver's Travels' cannot easily be imagined" (n. pag.). But Wolfe also suggested, in words that echo Brooks's definition of plot as an organising and intentional structure, that he subjected his material to the function of plot:

> [W]e are the sum of all the moments of our lives – all that is ours is in them: we cannot escape or conceal it. If the writer has used the clay of life to make his book, he has only used what all men must, what none can keep from using. Fiction is not

[6] For de Voto's review, see Louis D. Rubin, Jr., ed., *A Collection of Critical Essays*, by Thomas Wolfe (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall 1973) 72-79.

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> fact, but fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose. (n. pag.)

Wolfe provided Webber with the same philosophy of writing, and the fact that both author's and hero's fictional creations are dictated to some extent by their understandings of reality or truth highlights their task of selection and arrangement of material. As a result of his approach, Wolfe's novels bore very close resemblances to his own life, with his protagonists all being writers, Faustian heroes who travelled widely in search of fame and a way of ordering their material. Of particular significance in Wolfe's interest in American experience was, as Steinbeck also identified, the tendency to move about in search of a place to settle happily, although for Wolfe the notion of homelessness in America seems a product of it being a country of immigrants, a race of cultural orphans. In his application for a Guggenheim fellowship in 1929, he described his purpose as a writer as being "to find out why Americans are a nomad race…why thousands of young men, like this writer, have prowled over Europe, looking for a door, a happy land, a home, seeking for something they have lost, perhaps racial and forgotten; and why they return here" (qtd. in Pleasant 4). Wolfe consequently often characterised his own novels as works of discovery (as he did in the preface to *The Web and the Rock*) and critics have frequently characterised them as *künstlerromane*. Either way, Eugene Gant (the protagonist of the first two novels) and George Webber are young men who, like the heroes of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, act on their desires and go in search of the American Dream.

The Dream is just one type of quest, but it is unique to the American context, having historically embodied the aspirations of American mobility. Although Brooks makes use mainly of nineteenth-century European novels to expound his theory, his argument for a modernist crisis is propitiously commensurate with America's historical experience since the repeated deferral of the end goal established the westering pattern that pushed back the frontier. Importantly, the Dream enables a discussion about the desired ends of the questing characters. Fitzgerald, Steinbeck and Wolfe seem to have been aware of the various mythic structures – "ready-made life plots" as Brooks calls them (239) – and in their fiction made use of those patterns, but also asserted themselves against them. This thesis raises the question of how the authors treated those mythical plots that they inherited as American writers, what they made of them in responding to their own historical moment and how this treatment emerges on the level of narrative operation. This thesis, then, looks to apply Brooks's theory of narrative dynamic to a new context – one that is American, modernist, and characterised by increased urbanisation and globalisation. It is a context that offers new opportunities for but also new conditions relating to mobility – there are now, as Bauman indicates, degrees of mobility (86).

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It is essentially a study that, having recognised a conjunction between mobility and narrative structuration, implies that a new globalised world would affect the manner in which journey narratives operate and aims to examine the confrontation between early twentieth-century mobility and modernist thought as a way of relating narrative dynamic and the American Dream.

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CHAPTER ONE

"A Story of the West": Retracing the Irredeemable Past in *The Great Gatsby*

Near the end of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, his narrator Nick Carraway, ready to return home to Minnesota, makes a curious assessment of his sojourn in the East by claiming "that this has been a story of the West" (184), which suggests that he is referring to the West in its mythic capacity. Despite being "aware of [the East's] superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio" (184-85), Nick decides to return home to the Midwest and ascribes his return to the death of Jay Gatsby, the bootlegger who "represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (6). "After Gatsby's death," Nick tells us, "the East was haunted for me […], distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction" (185). Nick's reference to his "eyes' power of correction" suggests his need to put his memories in order and clarify his experience, which calls to mind Peter Brooks's assertion that we subject the world and our experience in it to narrative, "recounting and reassessing our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed" (3). Nick's journey, therefore, gains much of its meaning from that of Gatsby.

Since Gatsby's journey precedes Nick's, the novel invites a comparison to that of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.[7] Indeed, what Brooks claims about Conrad's novel is equally true of Fitzgerald's: that it is narrated by a character who attempts to explain, in retrospect, the quest of another in order to provide an account of his own journey in the process (238). Similarly to Marlow who, out of "an impulse of unconscious loyalty" (105) undertakes the "care of [Kurtz's] memory" (72), Nick displays perplexing loyalty to Gatsby after the latter's death. Before his final departure from Gatsby's house, Nick effaces the obscene words someone had written on the porch, and, aware of the outrageous rumours regarding Gatsby's past, claims to want to "clear this set of misconceptions away" (107). Like Marlow in his account of Kurtz, Nick attempts to give a final, definitive version of Gatsby's story.

Nick's decision to correct what he considers to be misapprehensions about Gatsby's life is curious, given his own initial suspicion about Gatsby's background and his doubt as to the

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[7] In a letter to H. L. Mencken, Fitzgerald acknowledged his indebtedness to Conrad, claiming, "God! I've learnt a lot from him!" (*Letters* 482). Although he never specified what precisely he gained from his readings of Conrad, critics have frequently identified technical similarities in their use of narrators Marlow and Nick, as well as several thematic parallels between *The Great Gatsby* and a number of Conrad's works. See, for example, John Skinner, "The Oral and the Written: Kurtz and Gatsby Revisited," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 17.1 (1987): 131-140; Robert Emmet Long, "The Great Gatsby and the Tradition of Joseph Conrad" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 8.3 (1966): 407-422; Robert Wooster Stallman, "Conrad and *The Great Gatsby*" Twentieth Century Literature 1.1 (1955): 5-12.

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legitimacy of Gatsby's social progression since young men "in my provincial inexperience […] didn't drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on Long Island Sound" (54). Throughout the novel, Gatsby's past is a matter of contention; among the guests at his parties, rumours about him abound – that he is a bootlegger, that he killed a man, that he was a German spy in the war and, more elaborately, that he is the "nephew of von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil" (65). Despite the mystery surrounding it, we learn, of course, that the past is important to Gatsby, for when he reveals his desire to reclaim Daisy Buchanan, whom he lost five years earlier, Nick explains: "He talked a lot about the past and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain point and go over it all again, he could find out what that thing was…." (117). That it is Gatsby's death that serves as the impetus for Nick's return suggests that his investigation into Gatsby's rise is done in view of his end – his tragic death – and this resonates with Brooks's point that the narrative progression is always in terms of the end, that we read in terms of the end because it is there where we seek meaning.

Nick tries to rewrite Gatsby's story from the beginning, providing him with a new plot, so that his story can seem to end differently. The earliest piece of evidence regarding Gatsby's true background presents itself after his death when Nick, loyally arranging a funeral for him, meets Gatsby's father, Henry C. Gatz, who explains that his son "had a big future ahead of him […]. If he'd of lived he'd of been a great man" (176). Despite his disdain for Gatsby's criminality, early on in his account Nick states unequivocally, as though to protest against an objection, "No – Gatsby turned out all right at the end" (6). As readers, we are carried along by the idea that Gatsby will be redeemed, that Nick's narrative will confer on the bootlegger the quality of greatness that Henry claims he missed.

When Henry presents a copy of *Hopalong Cassidy*, at the back of which is a list made in 1906 by the 16-year-old James Gatz, Nick discovers that Gatsby had plotted his way since childhood:

> No wasting time at Shafters or [a name, indecipherable]
> No more smokeing or chewing
> Bath every other day
> Read one improving book or magazine per week
> Save $3.00 per week
> Be better to parents (181-2)

Gatsby's list of resolutions identifies his mission as that of a self-made man, one whose mission was not merely the attainment of wealth but also the transformation of himself into a refined, eloquent and industrious person. This process of self-creation is set in motion after Gatsby leaves

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home at 17. The changing of his name and, especially, the reinvention of himself as an orphan – which identifies his mission with the American myth – are symbolic indications of the notion that Americans are free from the constraints of the past. While critics have noted that Gatsby's list resembles Benjamin Franklin's aphorisms for self-improvement and frugality as put forth in his *Autobiography*, Gatsby's criminality suggests, however, that his path to wealth was not accomplished as innocuously as Franklin's.

Nick presents this process of self-creation in a way that illustrates the reversal of East-West influence. He suspects that James Gatz (as Gatsby was born) must have had his new name ready at the moment that "witnessed the beginning of his career" (104), the point at which his journey gains force, which was Gatsby's initial encounter with Dan Cody on Lake Superior, when he prevented Cody's yacht from being damaged by strong winds. Cody, observing Gatsby's quickness and ambition, buys him new clothes and becomes his mentor and benefactor. Upon seeing Cody's portrait in Gatsby's bedroom, Nick identifies him as "the pioneer debauchee who during one phase of American life brought back to the eastern seaboard the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon" (106). As a mining tycoon whose fortune is a product of Gilded Age expansion, Cody embodies the exploitative endeavours born on the frontier. His yacht, with which he and Gatsby circumnavigated North America (an indication of his mobility and an act symbolic of America's discovery), is named the *Tuolomee*, which, Kermit W. Moyer indicates, refers to the gold fields of California and is simultaneously indicative of the end of the frontier and the materialism that replaced it (223). Critics have noted that Cody's name alludes to two prominent frontier heroes. As John Rohrkemper explains,

> [w]e are told that the moment of self-creation coincides with his meeting of and apprenticeship to the millionaire adventurer Dan Cody, whose name is a fusion of two more American heroes, Daniel Boone and Buffalo Bill Cody. The linking of these figures in the name of Gatsby's mentor suggests the thematic technique of *The Great Gatsby*.
>
> Both Boone and Cody are westerners, icons of the American pioneer experience, of rugged individualism, of faith in manifest destiny. One however, is the authentic hero, the explorer in which the American dream might be realized. The other the exploiter of the dream, who, whatever his accomplishments, capitalized on the western myth and created a parody of it, one who became, himself, a parody of the heroic pathfinder. Boone and Cody also play out the East-West, West-East pattern of the novel, one pushing Euro-American civilization west, the other doubling back, bringing back west – or at least a theatrical version of it – to the East. It comes back badly tarnished. […] Thus, Dan Cody, in some ways like Buffalo Bill, brings back not the essential courage and decency of the westward pioneers, but the superficial, or, in the case of Gatsby's mentor, the corrupted elements of westward expansion. (155-56)

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This dualism in Western enterprise also attends life in the East, as Nick discovers upon meeting Gatsby's current mentor, Meyer Wolfsheim. Like Cody, Wolfsheim is an aid in Gatsby's rise. Having groomed Gatsby for a life in crime, Wolfsheim's response to Nick's question about whether he got Gatsby started in business – "Start him! I made him" (179) – challenges the notion of Gatsby as being self-made. Moreover, with the likes of Wolfsheim, Nick discovers that New York is a mercenary city, a place that allows for the realisation of any kind of dream, even corrupt ones, and also sabotages dreams, prohibiting some from making their way.

Wolfsheim demonstrates this point, having fixed the 1919 World Series simply because "[h]e saw the opportunity" (78). Nick, who had desired to make his fortune in New York and who had envisioned the city as a place of new and fresh beginnings – "[t]he city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time" (73) – learns that social mobility is a contingent matter; dreams are left to chance. The city is at once an extensive realm of possibility – it accommodates any type of aspiration – but also enables success *without any* aspiration, and thus for Nick produces, not hope, but disillusionment: "'Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge,' I thought; anything at all….' Even Gatsby can happen, without any particular wonder" (73). Exactly what *happens* when it comes to Gatsby is rather spectacular, as Nick discovers upon witnessing his parties, the elaborateness of which resonates with the parodic enactment – or performance – of western enterprise as Rohrkemper noted with reference to Bill Cody.

Gatsby's parties, at which guests partake in an endless cycle of indulgence and waste "according to the rules of behaviour associated with amusement parks" (45), indicate that the Boone-like individual's self-sufficiency has been modified into the love of material excess:

> In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. […] And on Mondays eight servants including an extra gardener toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden shears, repairing the ravages of the night before. (43)

The extravagance on display indicates Gatsby's belief that material excess is fundamental to realising one's dreams. Thus when Jordan explains Gatsby's plan to Nick by simply saying, "He wants her to see his house" (84), she is indicating that Gatsby trusts that the lavishness of his mansion – the large rooms, the neat lawn, the swimming pool – will enable him to win Daisy back. Gatsby's belief that conspicuous consumption is a means to Daisy resonates with the tendency in America, as Jim Cullen identifies it, to treat happiness as a concretely realisable state (39), although in Gatsby's case, of course, this propensity exceeds simple gain and modulates into waste. Cullen

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contends that this notion is frequently invoked in advertising (39) as a manipulation of the foundation of the Declaration of Independence – "that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" (38). His point is that advertising promotes the idea that everyone has the right to buy, which is enforced by the idea that material possessions will bring about happiness. Indeed, advertising is a key aspect employed by Fitzgerald to depict how the quest toward the realisation of the Dream is plotted.[8]

Primarily through Gatsby and Myrtle, Fitzgerald depicts an interpretation of the Dream of consumption as endorsed through the media. Myrtle uses the time she spends with Tom and the articles she gains from him to temporarily abandon her life in the valley of ashes and inhabit another world. On the day that Tom takes Nick to meet her, within the space of their trip to the apartment, she stops at a newsstand to buy a copy of "Town Tattle," a film magazine, and, at a drug store, cold cream and perfume, before requesting that Tom buy her a dog because "[t]hey're nice to have," and lets four taxis pass before selecting one to her taste, "lavender-colored with grey upholstery" (31). She relates disdainfully that her husband married her in a borrowed suit and explains to Nick that her attraction to Tom upon seeing him for the first time was due entirely to his clothes: "He had on a dress suit and patent leather shoes and I couldn't keep my eyes off him but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head" (40). During the party she hosts on the afternoon that Nick meets her, Nick learns that Myrtle is used to gazing at adverts. In the apartment, there are several more copies of "Town Tattle" and Broadway tabloids which indicate that Myrtle looks to the media for direction in assuming the role of someone sophisticated.

The media is a prominent feature in the novel, with Tom and Jordan also skimming through magazines when Nick visits the Buchanans for dinner and, of course, the valley of ashes is overlooked by a billboard advertising an optometrist who has since left the area. While Gatsby has his *Hopalong Cassidy* list of resolutions, Myrtle is keen to list too: "I got to write down a list so I won't forget all the things I got to do" (41). They both piece together identities, with the aid of advertisements. Nick compares listening to Gatsby talk to "skimming hastily through a dozen magazines" (71) and Daisy later tells him, "You look like the advertisement of the man" (125). But Myrtle's mannerisms seem unnatural; after re-dressing, Nick claims that she changed her "costume" (35), suggesting that her behaviour comes across as an act. Accordingly, when Myrtle changes her dress (twice in one afternoon), she undergoes a change of persona:

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[8] For a discussion on the novel's treatment of media and advertising, see Ronald Berman, "'Oh, Science and Art, and All That': Reflections on *The Great Gatsby*," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 23.3 (1989): 85-95.

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> With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change. The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garden was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air. (35)

In a way, Gatsby's and Myrtle's plans overlap. Both, as Ronald Berman argues, associate style with class (88). They rely upon articles to assume the roles of people corresponding to their desired ends. Myrtle, although she does not belong to Tom's class, wants to convince everyone that she deserves to be in Tom's company, that she is sophisticated enough to inhabit his world. Although Gatsby has more resources available to him, more agency than Myrtle does, he does not do a particularly convincing job either. He conveys an oddly theatrical presence (even the novel's title evokes a vaudeville quality) and like Myrtle, appears to be putting on an act.

Gatsby comes across as a composite character. He speaks in "elegant sentences" (69) and Nick suspects that he chooses his words carefully, while his gestures are exceedingly formal, bowing to guests when excusing himself from their company. The elaborateness of his house, his performance as host and his fantasy background, demonstrate the *staging* of Gatsby's desire. As an inhabitant of West Egg, home to movie and Broadway stars who frequent his parties, Gatsby resides in a simulative milieu. His house, too, is a composite, comprising period bedrooms, Marie Antoinette music rooms, Restoration saloons, an Adam study and Gothic library. It is "a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden" (9). This composite quality is, of course, a result of Gatsby's self-creation, but the effect thereof – because it seems so inauthentic – is that it casts doubt upon Gatsby's claims about himself.

While Gatsby employs mannerisms and acquires artefacts that he believes to be consistent with someone of his imagined background of affluence and education, he manages, however, to continually allay Nick's misgivings so that Nick is never capable of dismissing him entirely. "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures," Nick claims, "then there was something gorgeous about him" (6). Nick senses a discreet quality to Gatsby's behaviour that perhaps indicates that these gestures do not stem from a core self, but that are they are "successful" suggests that there is something convincing about them nevertheless. When Gatsby tells Nick the story of his false background, Nick is unconvinced and becomes increasingly suspicious. However, determined not to let Nick have the "wrong idea" (69) about him, to think he is "just some nobody" (71), Gatsby presents his army decoration from the Montenegrin government and Nick admits that to "[his] astonishment the thing had an authentic look" (71). He then presents a photo of himself at Oxford, cricket bat in hand and in the company of men in blazers, and Nick concedes, "Then it was all true"

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(71). Gatsby's apparent authenticity is also noted by Owl Eyes upon seeing, with astonishment, the books in Gatsby's library:

> 'Absolutely real – have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and – Here! Lemme show you.'
>
> Taking our skepticism for granted he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the 'Stoddard Lectures.'
>
> 'See!' he cried triumphantly. 'It's a *bona fide* piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! *What realism*! Knew when to stop too – didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?' (50, emphases added)

Owl Eyes knows that since books are expensive and since the rich who have libraries have collected their books over many years, there are bound to be people who own false books to create an impression. The books' authenticity indicates the scope of Gatsby's expenditure and, along with the artefacts from his past that he shows Nick, corroborate his fiction of having a privileged and affluent background. Gatsby's aim in displaying a sense of authenticity is to reproduce a false past. When Gatsby failed to wed Daisy five years earlier, he was "a penniless young man without a past" (156), who came close to her because, as Richard Godden suggests, he was "rendered classless by the anonymity of the military uniform" (353) and therefore, as Walter Allen says, conceived of as "temporarily a gentleman" (88). The reason for having – or rather, seeming to have – a particular past (and what exactly that past embodies) is fundamental to Gatsby's mobility. His project is about more than wealth, as his *Hopalong Cassid*y list indicates; it is about being a certain type of person. He accumulates wealth so as to reclaim Daisy, but she alone is not his goal. Daisy represents a particular way of life to Gatsby; marriage to her will permit entry into the social class he desires.

The suburbs of East and West Egg are symbolically charged with the implications of the myth of the frontier: West Egg is home to the nouveau riche, many of them involved in the entertainment industry, while East Egg is home to "old money." West Egg represents the western ideals of novelty and freedom from the constraints of history, while East Egg embodies a distinct and traceable connection to the past. West Egg represents the possibilities of social mobility, as Nick confirms when he says that "[t]he truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (104). Nick even refers to Gatsby's anachronistic house, with its inclusion of several architectural styles, as his "ancestral home" (162), suggesting that the house has a history, albeit one that Gatsby created himself. Yet Nick also claims that West Egg is "the less fashionable of the two" (9), which means that the East holds some superiority over the West. The Buchanans, born into their wealth, have a long-established social position upon which their fortune is founded, and thus embody respectability.

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Gatsby may be *in* the East, but he is not *of* the East, with regard to its associated urbanity – and thus his wealth, however abundant, is not enough to enable his reunion with Daisy. Fraudulently come by, his money is not tied to a secure social position, as Tom's money is. Given that there is a particular style associated with the Buchanans' class that is lacking in West Egg, Gatsby needs to abide by certain social expectations about what to do with his money. Tom makes this clear, for it is he who reveals Gatsby to be a phony, calling him "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere" (137) and his car a "circus wagon" (128). Tom sees through Gatsby, dismissing his claim of being an Oxford man because he wears a pink suit and suggesting that the tag "old sport" was picked up somewhere. Throughout the novel, Tom is concerned with origins, heritage and secure social standing: when Nick visits East Egg, Tom, raving about a book that posits the diminishment of Nordic power, rages that "[c]ivilization's going to pieces" (17); he disputes the breed of the dog he buys for Myrtle, and he keeps horses which, Suzanne Del Gizzo argues, displays his fixation on authentic bloodlines (88). It is this relation between blood and money that restricts Gatsby's social progression.

Previously limited by his origins, Gatsby's quest is truly tragic because, although a self-made man, he must reinvent himself as a recognisable member of the Buchanans' class; his mobility should appear as a product not of his own enterprise but of a familial legacy. Appearing to have a lineage of affluence is the great irony in Gatsby's quest. It is a betrayal of the American Dream's principle that lineage is irrelevant to success. Since Gatsby has to recreate an imagined past, one that is indicative of long-established wealth, he claims to have an education at Oxford in keeping with family tradition and makes no attempt to disabuse his guests of the rumours that he is related to European royalty. However, the question of entering the Buchanans' class is problematised not only by the issue of money or style. They have a particular way of being, as Nick discovers during his first dinner in a scene that echoes Eliot's *Waste Land*[9] – a poem Fitzgerald knew almost by heart (Eble 87) – in its depiction of idleness:

> 'We ought to plan something,' yawned Miss Baker, sitting down at the table as if she were getting into bed.
> 'All right,' said Daisy. 'What'll we plan?' She turned to me helplessly. 'What do people plan?' (16)

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[9] In a letter to his editor, Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald wrote that he had a "profound admiration" for Eliot and called him "the greatest living poet in any language" (*Letters* 199). Edwin M. Moseley calls the novel "a prose Waste Land" (qtd. in Kehl and Cooper 203). Several other scenes in the novel have resonances with Eliot's poem, most notably, of course, the valley of ashes, which Fitzgerald describes as a "waste land" (28). The novel's resemblance to Eliot's poem has been widely discussed. For a reading that presents a significant amount of parallels between *The Waste Land* and *The Great Gatsby*, and which presents Eliot's poem as an important source of inspiration for Fitzgerald, see Letha Audhey, "The Waste Land Myth and Symbols," *The Great Gatsby*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986) 109-122.

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Nick's mistake is to read this languidness as relaxed sophistication; he continually feels apologetic in their company, an indication that he, too, is not accustomed to their style: "You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy […] Can't you talk about crops or something?" (17). The exchange between Daisy and Jordan Baker foreshadows the former's lament later in the novel: "What'll we do with ourselves this afternoon […] and the day after that, and the next thirty years?" (125). Both quotations closely resemble a passage in "A Game of Chess," the second section in Eliot's poem, in which the speaker, experiencing the anxiety of having no purpose, threatens to do something outrageous:

> 'What shall I do now? What shall I do?
> I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street
> With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?
> What shall we ever do?'
> The hot water at ten.
> And if it rains, a closed car at four.
> And we shall play a game of chess.
> Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door. (lines 131-138)

The significance of the novel's resemblance to Eliot's poem is wide-ranging,[10] but one of the implications is that Fitzgerald has created a fictional world in which people are overwhelmed by a sense of ennui and subsequently seek temporary escapes from the monotony of their everyday lives. Daisy does so with Gatsby and Tom with Myrtle, and perhaps Jordan attempts the same with Nick. Referring to Eliot's poem, it can be argued that the Buchanans' temporary escapes to distract themselves from their ennui are a type of game, trivial amusements to pass the time, a sign that they are at loose ends. Therefore, while they do follow through on their desires (like Gatsby does), theirs tend to be fickle, inconsequential, and satisfied as they arise, as opposed to Gatsby's long-term project. In terms of Northrop Frye's explication of the quest, the Buchanans' aspirations are merely agonistic; the conflict never develops into a complete struggle, although it would be inaccurate to identify them as being on a quest, given their lack of drive.

Nick, for one, is repeatedly astonished by Daisy's lack of intention. After leaving dinner, which was interrupted by Myrtle's phone call, he muses, "It seemed to me that the thing for Daisy to do was to rush out of the house, child in arms – but apparently there were no such intentions in her head" (25), and during the confrontation between Tom and Gatsby, when everyone expects her

[10] The scene also mirrors the indolence of Myrtle's party that Nick will visit some time later, where the talk is insubstantial and the company undirected, where people merely discuss things to do but fail to follow through and act. As Eliot did in "A Game of Chess," Fitzgerald juxtaposes two settings in close succession, one grandly genuine and the other pathetically parodic, inhabited by two different classes of people, both equally vacuous. Moreover, James E. Miller, Jr. – who has also analysed the similarities between the novel and Eliot's poem – identifies "A Game of Chess" as "the juxtaposition of two dramatic scenes of sexual intrigue or malaise or conflict" (245), may be seen as another corresponding element between the two texts.

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to choose, she seemed "as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all" (139). Nick explains further that before settling in the East, the Buchanans lived in France for a year "for no particular reason," after which they "drifted here and there" (10). Unlike Gatsby, who moves east and builds a house to attain his dream, the Buchanans' world is an end in itself. Paradoxically, Daisy, shortly after pondering what people plan, tells Nick, "I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything" (22), and Nick notes that the Buchanans moved about "wherever people played polo or were rich together" (10). Their mobility might be related to that of Zygmunt Bauman's "tourists" in that they traverse homogenous spaces – they never leave familiar territory, so that their mobility, ironically, produces a very static quality; they are mobile without really moving.

The complete lack of purpose and direction that characterises their movement indicates that while they appear to be living the American Dream, at least as portrayed in the media, the end towards which everyone else attempts to move, they are simultaneously incompatible with the Dream because they lack drive. Gatsby is the only character who moves east exhibiting any tendency for mobility because he is the only one to relocate with definite purpose. This drive is what Nick admires about him most. He tells us that Gatsby possessed a "heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (6), an "extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness" (6). This assertiveness is also the quality that most clearly differentiates Nick's quest from Gatsby's. Gatsby possesses something that Nick recognises himself as lacking. Nick does not choose his own career or his accommodation, and throughout the novel characterises himself as non-committal and undecided, a quality that is probably most evident in his relationships with women. Rumoured to have been engaged to a girl back home in the Midwest, a claim which he denies, Nick has a brief affair with a girl at work and, upon first meeting Jordan, exchanges a glance with her that is "consciously devoid of meaning" (19). He is "full of interior rules that act as brakes on my desires" (63-4). In stark contrast to Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy, the clear object of his desire, Nick is incapable of translating his desire into action:

> I liked to walk up Fifth Avenue and pick out romantic women from the crowd and imagine that in a few minutes I was going to enter into their lives, and no one would ever know or disapprove. Sometimes, in my mind, I followed them to their apartments on the corners of hidden streets, and they turned and smiled back at me before they faded through a door into warm darkness. At the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and felt it in others – poor young clerks who loitered in front of windows waiting until it was time for a solitary restaurant dinner – young clerks in the dusk, wasting the most poignant moments of night and life.
>
> Again at eight o'clock, when the dark lanes of the Forties were five deep with throbbing taxi cabs, bound for the theatre district, I felt a sinking in my heart. Forms

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> leaned together in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes outlined unintelligible gestures inside. Imagining that I, too, was hurrying toward gayety and their intimate excitement, I wished them well. (61-2)

This desire for a connection with others calls to mind Nick's brief interaction with a passerby shortly after his arrival in the East. After giving the passerby directions, he claims, "I was lonely no more" (8). As Del Gizzo explains, this disconnection from others only exacerbates his restlessness (73), which Nick believes is partly alleviated by the fluidity of city life. "I began to like New York," he says, "the racy, adventurous feel of it at night and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye" (61). This restlessness signifies the alienation that is characteristic of this modern, post-war society. There are several references in the novel to people not being at rest: during Nick's dinner at the Buchanans, "[Tom's] eyes flash[ed] about restlessly" (12), he "hover[ed] restless about the room" (14), and "[Jordan's] body asserted itself with a restless movement of her knee" (22). Even Gatsby is restless, a sign of him being open to opportunity. It is significant that Nick notices Gatsby's restlessness in the scene where he discusses Gatsby's car because he identifies the movement of people and cars in the city as a way of relieving restlessness:

> He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American – that comes, I suppose, with the absence of lifting work or rigid sitting in youth and, even more, with the formless grace of our nervous, sporadic games. This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening or closing of a hand. (68)

Gatsby's "gorgeous car" (68) is imperative to his quest. "On week-ends his Rolls Royce," Nick tells us, "became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city, between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains" (43). "People were not invited," he says, "they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door" (45). Like Gatsby's guests, the Buchanans deal with their restlessness by getting into their cars, but end up driving about pointlessly.

The car as chronotope traces narrative desire, mapping spatially the temporal progression set in motion by desire that manifests as restlessness. But when people are moving aimlessly around in the place where they hope to attain their dreams or appear already to have attained it, and apparently have nowhere else to go, driving becomes reckless, as several examples throughout the novel

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confirm.[11] There is the mysterious car accident after one of Gatsby's parties involving Owl Eyes, we are told that Tom was involved in a car accident with a chambermaid shortly after marrying Daisy, and, of course, the pivotal moment in the text is the accident during which Myrtle is killed, an event that ultimately leads to Gatsby's death, the impetus for Nick's return west. The crash indicates that when desire meets the appointed *topos*, time disrupts the plot's progression. This is the case when Gatsby, Nick, Jordan and the Buchanans decide to escape the heat; what ensues while they laze around at the Plaza Hotel is a confrontation between Tom and Gatsby about the latter's involvement with Daisy. It is the moment when Gatsby's plan to be reunited with her is openly revealed, and when she is expected to make a decision about her future with him but fails to do so. The scene preceding the crash suggests that some form of resolution, however partial, will be achieved, but instead it leads to the moment at which the plot unravels. This happens in the valley of ashes, a barren landscape that also calls to mind Eliot's poem:

> About half way between West Egg and New York the motor-road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is the valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the form of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (27)

The setting offers a grim counterpart to the moral sterility lurking behind the lush greens of East and West Egg. That it is used as a dumping ground for the refuse of Long Island symbolises the way in which its inhabitants, the Wilsons, are wasted for the sake of the mobility and security of the wealthy. Wilson is "a blonde, spiritless man, anaemic and faintly handsome" (29) who works hard repairing cars. When first introduced in the novel, he suggests unconvincingly that his business is doing well. Wilson "stare[s] at the people and the cars that passed along the road" (144), helping to maintain the mobility of others, including the Buchanans, but is himself immobile. Like his wife,

[11] Driving has frequently been seen as a metaphor for moral irresponsibility in the novel. Nick relates an incident when, returning with Jordan from a house party, she swerves the car dangerously and nips a passerby's coat. What ensues is a conversation between the two in which Nick expresses his belief that bad driving is a sign of a careless person. This association resonates twice in the novel. The first is when Nick and Jordan's attraction seems to have fizzled out and perhaps feeling a little bitter, she remarks, "You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn't I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride" (186). The second example relates to Nick's eventual rejection of the Buchanans as "careless people" who "smashed up things" (187). Both remarks come after Gatsby's death. Interestingly, much of the focus for critics discussing the driving metaphor in the novel has been placed, not on Daisy, but on Jordan Baker, whose name is a combination of two automobile manufacturers, and who is notorious for having borrowed a convertible and left the top down in the rain. A number of critics have investigated possible influences from advertising of the day that may have provided Fitzgerald with the automobile theme, and there are fascinating readings of the possible influence that the provocative image of freedom and opportunity evoked in Jordan magazine adverts may have played in the creation of Jordan Baker: see R. A. Corrigan, "Somewhere West of Laramie, On the Road to West Egg: Automobiles, Fillies, and the West in *The Great Gatsby*," *Journal of Popular Culture* 7.1 (1973): 152-58; Laurence E. MacPhee, "*The Great Gatsby*'s 'Romance of Motoring': Nick Carraway and Jordan Baker," *Modern Fiction Studies* (1972): 7-12.

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Wilson has aspirations. He does reveal, after learning of Myrtle's affair, that he wants to move them out west, a tacit indication that the East is no place for new beginnings. (Interestingly, Myrtle claims during her party that she aspires to marry Tom and move even further east, to Europe.) But then Myrtle is killed – with a car that Wilson repaired – and he avenges her death by killing the wrong man and eventually himself. The irony of Wilson's crime is that Gatsby, the biggest dreamer of all, who has plotted his quest most thoroughly, is killed by someone whose own desires are never translated into mobility.

In the moments that lead up to Myrtle's death, Tom decides who should travel with whom; Gatsby and Daisy in Tom's car and the rest in Gatsby's. The Buchanans' control over the mobility of others – both spatial and social – is subtly indicated here. As David Laird explains, "[d]angerous, irresponsible driving is the privilege of the arrogant and rich" (251). The manner in which the Buchanans' movement governs the movement of others is suggestive of their positions as "tourists" who set the tone for movement. The Buchanans are unassailable due to their social standing. They can evade responsibility to those whom they use temporarily. They can, like Owl Eyes after his car accident, deny any involvement and say, "It happened, and that's all I know" (59). Tragically, then, Wilson commits his crime believing in retribution, with the sins of others overlooked by a pair of eyes on the billboard of Dr T. J. Eckleburg, who represents the modernist perception of an absent God:

> Standing behind him Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg which had just emerged pale and enormous from the dissolving night.
>
> 'God sees everything,' repeated Wilson.
>
> 'That's an advertisement,' Michaelis assured him. (167)

Michaelis's dismissal of Wilson's stock phrase foreshadows Nick's later discovery that there is no retribution to be gained for the sins of the wealthy. Daisy is repeatedly associated with the colour white – it is the colour of her face, her dress, her car, and also the colour of purity and innocence, an indication of her unblemished and blameless life; as Jordan explains to Nick, despite moving about, Daisy "came out of it with an absolutely perfect reputation" (82). The Buchanans may enter other worlds if they choose – like Tom with his apartment in New York or trading cars with Wilson in the valley of ashes – but others cannot enter their world as easily. Myrtle could never inhabit East Egg. Daisy can afford to turn down Gatsby, Tom can keep Myrtle apart, travelling in a separate train car and hiding out in an obscure apartment, and he can allow Daisy to drive back to East Egg with Gatsby with no fear of losing her, because none of their trysts are ever going to amount to anything. When their security is threatened they withdraw, as Nick comments, "into their money or their vast

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carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they made" (187-8), so that their position in life remains intact.

It is this withdrawal – the denial of responsibility in order to selfishly protect themselves – that ultimately causes Nick to turn his back on the Buchanans. He realises that they live in a way, as he says of Jordan, "where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible" (63). After Daisy (who we are told was reluctant to marry Tom in the first place) reveals her unhappiness to Nick, she laughs it off, suddenly praising herself for being sophisticated, and Nick comments that

> I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to extract a contributary emotion from me. I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on her lovely face as if she asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged. (22)

Tom similarly explains his actions: "Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back" (138). That code is a product of their static lives and explains why the end of the novel brings little change, for the Buchanans go back to living as they did before, and Nick returns to the Midwest from which he came. The Buchanans' withdrawal forces Nick to dismiss them and side with Gatsby:

> 'They're a rotten crowd,' I shouted, across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch of them put together.'
>
> I've always been glad I said that. It was the only compliment I ever gave him, because I disapproved of him from beginning to end. (162)

Like Marlow's sense that Kurtz comes off well when compared to the Company men, Nick decides that Gatsby "turn[s] out all right" (6) as opposed to the likes of the Buchanans. Nick, of course, had his own aspirations, his own desire to settle. Like Gatsby, he believed in new beginnings, having arrived in the East with "that familiar conviction that life was beginning again with the summer" to find that "I was a guide, a pathfinder, an original settler" (8). However, Nick realises the emptiness of the Dream and turns his back on his desire, while Gatsby aimlessly continues pursuing Daisy.

Daisy gives purpose to Gatsby's life, something to direct his aspiration toward. Since marriage to Daisy would signify Gatsby's sense of arrival, she is symbolic of the Dream itself, an association often demonstrated with reference to her voice. The appeal, Gatsby explains to Nick, is that her voice "is full of money" and Nick then notes "the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it" (127). He suspects that "her low thrilling voice" had "an excitement in [it] that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispered 'Listen,' a *promise* that she had done

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gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour" (13-4, emphasis added). It articulates "an arrangement of notes that will never be played again" (13). Her voice compels Nick to move closer to her, as he suspects it does to others too: "I've heard it said that Daisy's murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming" (13). What she does with her voice is equally provocative; she flirts, but never acts on her suggestiveness.

Since the enchantment of her voice evokes a promise that is always temporally displaced and that this promise is never realised makes it relatable to Gatsby's "enchanted objects" (98), the props which are meant to facilitate the project of attaining Daisy. One of these is the green light at the end of the Buchanans' dock toward which he stretches his arms, as when Nick spots him for the first time:

> [H]e stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and as far as I was from him I could have sworn he was trembling. Involuntarily I glanced seaward – and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock. (25-6)

As an object of desire, the green light has other equivalences, such as Gatsby's house and clothes. These objects maintain enchantment only from a distance, only in terms of what they promise and not in terms of the purpose they serve in the present. They only have meaning in anticipation of desire being fulfilled. This is why there are rooms in Gatsby's house that are not lived in but merely gazed into, why Gatsby stretches his arms out toward the green light instead of walking to the end of the dock, why he stands at a curious distance from his guests without meeting them, why he keeps shirts he never wears, why he dismisses the Buchanans' relationship as "just personal" (160), as though their proximity to one another makes it less enchanting, and why he idealises a version of Daisy he knew in the past.

Proximity spoils the illusory nature of these objects. Consequently, Nick tells us, Gatsby's objects acquire a dream-like quality. The dream is most alive when far-off, before Gatsby is reunited with Daisy, when he held elaborate parties to entice her to visit. Nick, who notices that Gatsby and Daisy refuse to have him leave – "perhaps my presence made them feel more satisfactorily alone" (99) – appears to be aware that Gatsby's dream is most alive before he is reunited with Daisy. Although she represents the destination, the vitality of the Dream diminishes in her presence due to the elaborateness of Gatsby's vision, and after Gatsby points out the green light to Daisy, Nick suspects that it loses its significance:

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> Daisy put her arm through his abruptly but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (98)

Here is the onset of disenchantment; the green light begins to appear less like an illusion of the moon and more like the reality of a dock. Nick also suspects that Daisy may fall short of Gatsby's expectations because he had five years during which to elaborate his vision of her:

> As I went over to say goodbye I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness. Almost five years! There must have been moments even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams – not through her own fault but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. (101)

Nick is unwittingly implying that happiness cannot be retained in the present moment. That Daisy falls short of Gatsby's vision reveals the Dream's paradox: while it designates an endpoint toward which one strives, it only has meaning – it is only alive and enchanting – in that period of suspension before one arrives. The realisation of the dream remains elusive because, as Tony Tanner explains, the green light (like the other enchanted objects) is merely "a suitably inaccessible focus" for Gatsby's desire, something to direct his dream towards but all the time postponing consummation (167). This enchantment in suspension can be related to Brooks's "dilatory space," the space of suspension in which resistances are worked through before reaching full predication. But Daisy's resignation to life is inimical to Gatsby's quest because the crash in which Myrtle dies does not register as a significant moment for her. In the scene after the accident in which Nick goes to the Buchanans' house and finds Gatsby waiting outside for a signal from Daisy, his sense of expectation is defeated because she fails to act, and Nick comments that Gatsby stands "waiting over nothing" (153). Tragically, then, in the wake of Myrtle's death, Gatsby waits anxiously for Daisy's call. He tells the gardener not to drain the pool that he had not used all summer, buys a pneumatic mattress and, perhaps expecting Daisy to arrive shortly, gets into the pool (although not in the water). When Wilson shows up and shoots Gatsby in the pool, he effectively terminates the plot's sustained suspension.

In some way, Gatsby's mobility is his downfall, for Myrtle is killed with his car with which people are brought to his house. Gatsby's home, unlike that of the Buchanans, is a way station, not a final destination but a means to an end; he never properly settles there. Like the car, the house has a chronotopic purpose, at least when open to parties. Yet it turns out to be a static *topos* like the

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Buchanans' home because it brought about no change as the narrative progressed. Guests arrive every week because they expect the same thing to occur. "*Every* Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York – *every* Monday these same oranges and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves" (43, emphases added), Nick tells us. It never fulfils its purpose of successfully luring Daisy, which is why, before he leaves the East and he notices that "Gatsby's house was still empty when I left," Nick dismisses it as a "huge incoherent failure of a house" (188). If he had wanted the house for its own sake, Gatsby would have lived. Nick, aware that the suspense will lead to nothing, had earlier attempted to warn Gatsby against pursuing Daisy:

> "I wouldn't ask too much of her," I ventured. "You can't repeat the past."
> "Can't repeat the past?" he cried incredulously. "Why of course you can!"
> […]
> "I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before," he said, nodding determinedly. "She'll see." (116-17)

Gatsby's determination to "fix" circumstances echoes his claim that Meyer Wolfsheim "fixed" the World Series (78). They are not alone in trying to determine ends; Jordan Baker cheating in a golf tournament is another example – they all indicate attempts to bring about desired ends by illegitimately securing the future. However, they are also efforts to allay the uncertainty that attends aspirations. Gatsby's attempt to secure the future is problematic given that the dream he wishes to realise is based on the past; he refuses to submit to the vagaries of time. Nick describes Gatsby's astonishment at seeing Daisy's daughter: "I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (123). To be sure, the novel is "time-haunted," as Matthew J. Bruccoli argues ("Introduction" 11): Nick recalls his youth – his "younger and more vulnerable years" (5) – and there are also several references to the changing of seasons which in turn register the passage of time during the two years he spends in the East. There is also the incident in which Gatsby knocks a clock over and then catches shortly after meeting Daisy again at Nick's house, which critics have often read as symbolic of his desire to redeem time. The awareness of the passing of time may provide a clue to Nick's return west.

He identifies a commonality among all their aspirations (whatever these might be and whether they are sustained aspirations or not): they all desire to recapture moments from the past. He considers Daisy to "carry well-forgotten dreams from age to age" (143), while showing scepticism at the Buchanans' claim of settling permanently in the East, believing instead "that Tom would drift on forever seeking a little wistfully for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" (10). Nick's return can perhaps be understood in terms of Gatsby's explanation in an earlier version of the novel of his love for Daisy, that it is "a little like loving a place where you've

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once been happy" (qtd. in Tanner 183). This suggests an analogy between Gatsby's quest for Daisy and Nick's quest for home, as he evokes in a childhood memory:

> When we pulled into the winter night and the real snow, our snow, began to stretch out beside us and twinkle against the windows, and the dim lights of small Wisconsin stations moved by, a sharp wild brace came suddenly into the air. We drew in deep breaths of it as we walked back from dinner through the cold vestibules, unutterably aware of our identity with this country for one strange hour before we melted indistinguishably into it again.
>
> That's my middle-west – not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns but the thrilling, returning trains of my youth and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow. I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all – Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life. (184)

With this image of homecoming, Nick describes the feeling of belonging, of being content with one's position in life, of being secure. But the home that Nick recalls is gone, rendered untenable by the passage of time. Before arriving in the East, he had returned from war, restless and unmoored, to find that "[i]nstead of being the warm center of the world the middle-west now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe" (7), suggesting that whatever values Nick previously associated with the Midwest, the worldview he harboured there in his youth is now baseless. What precisely a "warm centre" constitutes for Nick is unclear, but Fitzgerald made use of the exact phrase in "My Lost City," an essay about his changing feelings towards New York City during the nineteen-twenties, which suggests one possibility. He wrote, "Moreover, she to whom I fatuously referred as 'my girl' was a Middle Westerner, a fact which kept the warm centre of the world out there, so I thought of New York as essentially cynical and heartless" (107). The connotation of amorousness calls to mind Nick's yearning for intimacy in the city; in the scene in which he discusses his desire, Nick envisions following women into "*warm* darkness" (61, emphasis added). The connotation suggests that the "warm centre" (7) can be conceived of as the point at which desire is satisfied, and thus the impetus for the quest.

In the same scene, Nick also refers to the repetitious nature of his desire, continually aroused but deferred and never satisfied. This deferral is relatable to his understanding that the centre is now elsewhere, moved to the periphery; it seems akin to the "heart" as the point where meaning is actualised in Marlow's inquiry into Kurtz. Indeed, the American Dream can be seen as receiving a similar treatment to that of civilization in Conrad's novel; both works, as Robert Wooster Stallman argues, concern a "world-as-spoil" (6), one whose hero is an imperialist, the other a gangster. That

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inability to reach the dreamt-of end – the sense that desire would be finally satisfied and thus absent there – accounts for Gatsby's failure to win back Daisy. It also makes questionable Nick's concession that Gatsby turned out all right, which occurs after he leaves the bootlegger's empty house before his departure from the East. Standing on Gatsby's beach and staring out at the sea, Nick realises the tragedy of Gatsby's dream. But Nick's account, while redeeming Gatsby in comparison to the Buchanans, fails to redeem him because, in positioning his quest within the history of America, Nick indicates that the big future that Henry Gatz claimed – and Gatsby believed – was ahead of him, was, in fact, already in the past:

> Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.
>
> And as I sat there, brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.
>
> Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther….And one fine morning —
>
> So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (189)

Nick recognises the continual struggle, as Fitzgerald identified in "The Crack-Up," between the aspirations for the future and historical flux; the image he conjures is one of time catching up to and ultimately overtaking dreams, and dreams end up in history. Nick suggests that Gatsby pursued his Dream in the spirit of people who arrived on the coast of the New World and with a hope commensurate with wonder present, not upon arrival, but in the moment of suspense before they reached the coast; people who were without ties, but not in search of a home – not seeking to arrive, their aim exploration rather than settlement. Nick describes what is self-defeating in the pursuit of the Dream: it recedes as one approaches it, so that America, from its very beginning, was a place, as Tocqueville suspected, in which one never fully arrives. As one nears it, the Dream moves away, so that one can never adequately reach an end.

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Certainly the reference to Dutch sailors is one that recognises people who are not in search of an end, but what Nick also makes clear is that they do meet an end of sorts – it is because they eventually arrive on the continent that the "fresh, green breast of the new world" gives way to "inessential houses" and why Nick recognises the Dream as already being behind Americans. Thus these westerners move eastward, their direction following that of the movement of people in the late nineteenth century towards the city, which became the main commercial centre. What happens since the arrival of Dutch sailors, and what explains the changes to "the old unknown world," is the emergence of a market. The Dutch sailors are indicative of both the onset of globalisation as well as a system of trade, and brings into focus urbanisation and industrialism, as Nick's observations of the changed landscape make clear. As will be discussed in the following chapter on John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, these processes have bearing on demands and modes of production, and translate into different types of mobility, so that the notion of the West as a place of unlimited opportunity no longer holds true. This is why the East is haunted for Nick: it is haunted by the history of the West.

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CHAPTER TWO

"A Little Piece of Land": The Problem of Settlement in *The Grapes of Wrath*

The period between the arrival of Dutch sailors, as Nick Carraway imagines them, and the Great Depression witnessed the once unknown land to the west being claimed by banks and large-scale agricultural corporations, and while the sailors may not have been driven by the purpose of settlement, this was precisely the desire of displaced tenant farmers forced off their land during the nineteen-thirties. The unemployment and uncertainty caused by the market crash was compounded by the Dust Bowl days – dust-storms across the Great Plains during 1934 and 1935, as well as long-lasting drought that forced thousands of families from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas and Colorado to move westward to California (Brogan 538). What emerges between the discovery of the New World and the Depression era is, among other things, an economy which brought about new conceptions of ownership of property and ways of relating to land, developments that are underpinned by the process of globalisation. Zygmunt Bauman explains that one of the consequences of globalisation is an increase in absentee landlords, indicating that since companies are owned by investors as opposed to employees the former distance themselves from the work (9). This absenteeism is relatable to the landowners' disaffiliation from the land during the Depression since tenant farmers were forced to sell their land to agricultural corporations that made use of more modern ways of cultivation but whose workers did not live on the land themselves.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, this detachment from the land poses a challenge to tenant farmers seeking to re-establish themselves since their way of life has been superseded by the implementation of new modes of cultivation. Through their displacement, the novel presents a kind of repetition of historical westward migration: as Walter Allen puts it, their journey is "a principle of recurrence," that "recreat[es] the experience of their forebears" (217). That this recurrence of westward movement is in part the result of impoverished land stresses the deterioration of material conditions upon which the view of America as a land of opportunity is based. However, the irony in *The Grapes of Wrath* is that despite these altered conditions, the myths of opportunity persist. While tenants do not move by choice and are generally reluctant to do so, they nevertheless envision arriving at a state of affairs considerably better than what they leave behind, as Pa Joad suggests when he says, "We had hard times here. 'Course it'll be different out there – plenty work, an' little white houses an' oranges growin' aroun'" (109). This view of California as a rich land, and thus a locus of new beginnings, is one which resurfaces throughout the novel. One tenant contemplates, "Maybe we can start again, in the new rich land – in California, where the fruit grows. We'll start

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over" (87). Landowners exploit this image, too, persuading tenants that "[t]here's work there, and it never gets cold. Why, you can reach out anywhere and pick an orange. Why there's always some kind of crop to work in" (34). The very formulaic nature of these visions of California indicates that *The Grapes of Wrath* belongs to a much older narrative tradition.

While Americans have historically established their quests upon a biblical awareness – William Bradford's pilgrims consciously compared themselves to the Israelites – California in particular inspired references to biblical pilgrimages. As Bruce Greenfield points out, the Golden State has historically been admired for its remoteness, its Mediterranean climate and its diverse landscape (207), and emigrants poured into California in greater and greater numbers during the 1840s, first for the fertile land, and after 1848, with the commencement of the gold rush, for the mines (211). He also asserts that the desert territory leading to fertile valleys echoed Old Testament descriptions that resonated with many emigrants (211). Thus, when Steinbeck penned *Grapes*, the image of California as America's Promised Land[12] was by no means new, and in composing the tenants' desire for home, he had available to him long-established mythic patterns that characterised California as a landscape that accommodated a particular instantiation of the Dream – that is, as a place that allowed for the self-sufficiency that the Joads pursue.

For them, the desire for "a little piece of land" (282) constitutes a synthesis of work and dwelling. Echoing Pa, Ma Joad says that in California it is "[n]ever cold. An' fruit ever'place, an' people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees. I wonder – that is, if we all get jobs an' all work – maybe we can get one of them little white houses" (91). Their vision embodies a version of the American Dream which Jim Cullen calls "the dream of home ownership" (133). "No American Dream," Cullen argues, "has broader appeal and no American Dream has been quite so widely realized" (136). Cullen attributes the initiation of this dream to British colonists. In contrast to other Europeans who viewed the American landscape mostly as a commodity that offered valuable resources to be shipped back home, British immigrants valued the land in itself as a place to establish a permanent home. American soil offered the opportunity to escape hostility back in Europe, start afresh and move up socially (Cullen 138). Having gained currency during the nineteenth century with the implementation of the Homestead Act which, inspired by Jeffersonian agrarianism, created the opportunity to acquire a privately-owned

[12] Several critics, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, have explored biblical symbolism in the novel. For discussions on biblical parallels in the novel, see H. Kelly Crockett, "The Bible and *The Grapes of Wrath*," *College English* 24.3 (1962): 193-99; Martin Shockley, "Christian Symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath*," *College English* 18.2 (1956): 87-90; Charles T. Dougherty, "The Christ-Figure in *The Grapes of Wrath*," *College English* 24.3 (1962): 224-226; Eric W. Carlson, "Symbolism in *The Grapes of Wrath*" *College English* (1958): 172-175. See Tamara Rombold, "Biblical Inversion in *The Grapes of Wrath*" *College Literature* 14.2 (1987): 146-166 for an analysis of how the novel departs from biblical themes. More recently, Elizabeth Napier has compared the novel to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a book found among the possessions of tenant farmers before their departure – see "*The Grapes of Wrath*: Steinbeck's *Pilgrim's Progress*," *Steinbeck Review* 7.1 (2004): 51-56.

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homestead (Cullen 141), the dream of home ownership again acquired significant force during the Depression era when thousands of sharecroppers were displaced.

As Steinbeck biographer Jackson J. Benson indicates, the migration was not explicitly acknowledged to the public, so that public response was generally one of indifference (158). Most Americans were affected by the Depression and focused on their own troubles. Furthermore, migrant workers were in large measure not that visible, surreptitiously travelling by night, out of the way to avoid trouble (158). Unsettled by what was happening, Steinbeck wanted to shed light on the migration problem, writing to his agent Elizabeth Otis that "I want to put a tag of shame on the greedy bastards who are responsible for this but I can best do it through newspapers" (*Letters* 162). Consequently he turned to non-fiction, producing articles for the *San Francisco News* in 1936, later republished in book form as *The Harvest Gypsies*. In one of these articles, Steinbeck recognised the migrants' need to re-establish themselves and resume their former way of life: "In their heads," he wrote, "as they move wearily from harvest to harvest, there is one urge and one overwhelming need, to acquire a little land again, and to settle on it and stop their wandering" (22).

In his journalistic pursuits, Steinbeck was inspired and assisted by photographers associated with the Farm Security Administration, such as Dorothea Lange, whose photographs he requested to accompany his articles, as well as Walker Evans and documentary filmmakers like Pare Lorentz. As Louis Owens explains, Steinbeck was faced with a dilemma in that documentaries tended to give the big picture, educating the audience but keeping them at a distance from the suffering (27). "The reader must not only be shown the enormity of the widespread suffering," Owens explains, "he must also identify with the migrants, and feel on a personal level their loss, their hope, their frustration and futility, their enduring strength" (28). The documentary genre may have influenced Steinbeck's narrative by inspiring an approach that would reveal the scope of the migration problem and indicate that the tenants' plight was grounded in real events, an approach explicable by a statement of his in the preface to *The Forgotten Village*, based on the documentary of the same name: "It means very little to know that a million Chinese are starving unless you know one Chinese who is starving" (n. pag.).

This philosophy was applied in *The Grapes of Wrath* with the alternation between two types of chapters. The narrative chapters, structured as a temporally linear plot, treat the Joads as the representative migrant family and depict their departure from Oklahoma, their journey and arrival in California, with temporary stops along the way. The interchapters – or "intercalary chapters" as Steinbeck called them (Owens 28) – depict incidents that fall outside of the Joads' field of experience, often the trials of generic tenant farmers, those in businesses who are not on the road but equally affected by the crisis, the changing of seasons and meditations on the changing landscape. Critics agree that the alternation of intercalary and narrative chapters serves to indicate

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that the Joads' plight is inextricably tied to broader social and historical circumstances, allowing the reader to encounter the crisis on a large social as well as personal and intimate scale. However, the distinction between the two types of chapters is not of immediate interest here. Rather, Steinbeck's journalistic aim raises the question of how he would have gone about subjecting his material to the demands of plot as defined by Peter Brooks.

In plotting the Joads' quest, Steinbeck utilises a recognisable motif in American journey narratives – the road, which has traditionally symbolised promise and the freedom of escape.[13] Its appeal gained perhaps its most prominent expression in the nineteenth-century poetry of Walt Whitman. In his "Song of the Open Road," Whitman enthusiastically sought "[t]o know the universe itself as a road" (179) and celebrates movement as invigorating and the road as a symbol of release:

> Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
> Healthy, free, the world before me,
> The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.
>
> Henceforth I ask not good-fortune – I myself am good fortune;
> Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
> Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
> Strong and content, I travel the open road. (lines 1-7)

Although taking to the road transpires from some desire – "I am afoot with my vision" (line 716) the speaker claims in "Song of Myself" – Whitman celebrates movement for its own sake. His is a "perpetual journey" (line 1201) in which the road constitutes a way of being; devoid of any particular end goal, the road is an end in itself and thus presents a type of solution to the tendency identified by Tocqueville.

As the passage along which the Joads' progress will play out, the road can be seen as the narrative's central chronotope, connecting various *topoi* with the promise of bringing about the desired end. Indeed, the chronotope of the road is, as Bakhtin defines it, "both a point of new departures and a place for events to find their denouement. Time, as it were, fuses together with

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[13] The road is, of course, a prominent allegorical symbol in classical and biblical traditions – see page 11 of the Introduction – often symbolising the course of one's life, most famously in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. A number of studies have looked at the road narrative as a prominent offshoot of the broader journey narrative tradition in America, and the road's longstanding cultural relevance. Some of these studies have resulted in a narrower interest in the role of the automobile in American literature. See Phil Patton, *Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), Cynthia Dettelbach, *In the Driver's Seat: The Automobile in American Literature and Culture* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976), David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein, *The Automobile and American Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983), Ronald Primeau, *Romance of the Road: Literature of the American Highway* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1996), and Kris Lackey, *Road Frames: The American Highway Narrative* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). A particularly interesting study which explores the road myth as a product of America's history and one which focuses roughly on the same historical period as this thesis is Joseph Addison Davis's dissertation *Rolling Home: The Open Road as Myth and Symbol in American Literature, 1890-1940* (University of Michigan, 1974).

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space and flows in it (forming the road)" (243-44). The implication for the quest as plotted along the highway is that the series of locations in California that serve as temporary homes may be relatable to Brooks's notion of "partial recognitions" (92) that influence the narrative dynamic by enhancing the expectation that the Joads will reach a final destination, thereby taking us as readers forward in the narrative. There is, however, a significant amount of travel that precedes the Joads' arrival in California, and it is this movement that foreshadows their eventual inability to settle because the developments which cause them to be displaced represent alternative kinds of progress that the plot develops against, countering the Joads' and other tenant farmers' original mission.

This larger "movement" is evidenced by the Joads' exchange with a petrol attendant in chapter 13. He relates that rich travellers do not make use of his station, preferring the large petrol companies in town, and he has painted his corroded tanks yellow in imitation of the competition in a vain attempt to attract customers. He then questions the country's progression: "I don't know what the country's comin' to," he laments (126). "Folks can't make a livin' no more. Fella can't make a livin' farmin'. I ask you, what's it comin' to?" (127). His question is essentially one of ends, of how the narrative may conclude. Tom's explanation that the "[c]ountry's movin' aroun', goin' places" (128) points toward the fact that large corporations are proliferating, putting independent businessmen and farmers out of work, the result of which is that individual progressive efforts are being confronted with and overridden by greater economic forces that are in turn subject to a broader historical process. That the tenants, like other small-scale labourers, bear the brunt of these social forces makes them relatable to Bauman's "vagabonds." Instead of signalling the promise of improvement, then, the Joads' movement is in fact a form of entrapment.

First, their movement is determined for them in the sense that they are forced to leave their homes, and second, many tenants sell household possessions to buy cars to take them along the journey west, but many of these even make their movement more precarious. Given that they are desperate to hit the road, they are vulnerable targets for opportunistic car salesmen because they are in no position to demand cars that are in good conditions. With generally little knowledge of the machines, the tenants' need is exploited by salesmen who sell them unfit vehicles. "The ancient Hudson" (123) with which the Joads travel, for instance, is in a poor condition, as is that of the Wilsons with whom they travel between Oklahoma City and California, which repeatedly breaks down along the way. Robert J. Griffin and William A. Freedman are correct in arguing that the Oklahomans' vehicles mirror their predicament, for as the Joads' situation worsens, so does the condition of their truck (573). The irony of the car as an insidious reflection of their deteriorating attempts at economic agency is that it is conventionally both an instrument of spatial mobility and a

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signifier of social mobility.[14] Tenants are aware of the car as being a representation of social status – they distrust anyone who drives a better car than they. In contrast to the extravagant transport of the contractors – the one who arrives in Hooverville drives a new Chevrolet coupé, while the one at Weedpatch drives a roadster – the tenants' transport is downright precarious. Instead, their makeshift vehicle reveals that their movement takes the form of a desperate escape:

> 66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight. (118)

The notion of flight is one of the ways in which Steinbeck depicts the migrants' loss of agency, the hostility and obstacles that they encounter on the road, through animal imagery. It is widely acknowledged that Steinbeck was interested in biology and the animal-basis of man (Dickstein 77). As Morris Dickstein observes, animal analogies allowed Steinbeck to explore the need to survive, the need for food and shelter, physical expression and the need to take care or be taken care of (72). This interest is certainly identifiable in *The Grapes of Wrath*.[15] The migrants, Sylvia Jenkins Cook notes, are likened to animals that are noted for their resilience and survival instinct (173), most notably the land turtle:

> The sun lay on the grass and warmed it, and in the shade under the grass the insects moved, ants and ant lions to set up traps for them, grasshoppers to jump into the air and flick their yellow wings for a second, sow bugs like little armadillos, plodding restlessly on many tender feet. And over the grass at the roadside a land turtle crawled, turning aside for nothing, dragging his high-domed shell over the grass. [...] As the embankment grew steeper and steeper, the more frantic were the efforts of the land turtle. (14-5)

The turtle enters upon a dust road just as Tom does when he is introduced into the novel walking home from prison. The turtle's struggles to avoid harm, such as when a car swerves to hit him and nicks his shell, overturning him, and his determination to keep going in his chosen direction (the same direction the migrants will take) despite Tom's attempts to keep him in his pocket, is of course

[14] Jim Cullen affirms the image of the car as a symbol of social mobility when he relates that Soviet authorities screened the film version of *The Grapes of Wrath* in an attempt to discredit American capitalism, but later banned the movie when it became apparent that audiences were impressed that the homeless Joads were nevertheless in possession of a car (150).

[15] It should be noted that Steinbeck at times compares machinery and corporations to animals; the imagery in novel is therefore not limited to the people. For an overview of comparisons to the various animals mentioned in the novel and their meanings, see Griffin and Freedman.

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a clear indication that his quest foreshadows that of the Joads. Casy unknowingly indicates this when he claims that turtles are "always goin' someplace. They always seem to want to get there" (44). The turtle analogy serves to demonstrate the tenants' vulnerability out on the road.

This sense of vulnerability and exposure on the one hand, and the Joads' determination to reach an end on the other, cause the narrative's tensions that emerge along the road. While Steinbeck invokes the mythic image of the road as a route to salvation or better fortune when a tenant farmer finds a copy of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* among household possessions, there is a difference for the tenants between what the road promises and what it delivers, and with each failed attempt to settle down, the Joads must return to the road. The road has, as George Henderson argues, an "ambiguous status" in the novel: "It beckoned at the same time as it restrained" (215). When Tom, who spent time in McAlester Penitentiary for murder, recalls that jail had regular meals and electricity, luxuries denied them on the road, and that the stability of prison life even drew men to commit crimes, he is suggesting that prison life might well be a viable alternative to the restricted life at Hooverville. Consequently, Frank Eugene Cruz asserts that the prison functions as a contrast to the migrant camps in which children die of starvation (64). Thus Tom exits one form of imprisonment as a convict and enters another as a "vagabond."

The unpredictability of life on the road is apparent in comparing the fate of Tom and the other tenants to that of Muley Graves, whom Casy criticises for breaking up his family by not joining them on their journey west. Lester Jay Marks argues that Muley is doomed because he refuses to adapt to the circumstances like the rest and move to seek new land, a fact apparent in his name: "Muley" suggests being obstinate, like a mule, while "Graves" suggests his being fated to die (72). Muley's name is clearly symbolic – as are others in the novel – but it is inaccurate to suggest that Muley is doomed – and that he has broken up his family – because he declines to "shove on west where it's easy livin'" (46), for even by leaving, families will fall apart, as the Joads do and the Wilsons and even Rose of Sharon's prospective nuclear family. Having remained in Oklahoma, Muley's prospects are not significantly different from those of the migrants.

Life on the road is an unpredictable one, and one in which families struggle to maintain the family structure, their former familial roles as well as domestic activities. Writing about the need to keep moving and its impact on sustaining home life, Jan Goggans argues that the migrants' world is one "of disruption, dislocation, instability and movement – all terms that are not associated with home*making* and house*keeping*" (40, original emphases). She asserts that Ma, unable to maintain cleanliness or cook as before, is forced to abandon both her home and her identity as a homemaker (43). She also argues that Ma's obsession with domestic chores like washing laundry "highlights Steinbeck's message of the migrants' desire for stability" (50). One of the images of the transitional quality of their existence is their jalopy which, failing to function well enough as a car, can at least

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be transformed by the Joads into something of a new home. It becomes "the new hearth, the living center of the family; half passenger car and half truck, high-sided and clumsy" (100). Thus, while the road always suggests arrival at new places, it also embodies a state of instability at odds with home life.

Although it brings about little development in the Joads' quest for home, the road does serve as a space of transformation that engenders a change in the initial vision of the tenants. Steinbeck suggests this transformation with the description of the private camp at which tenants gather upon arrival in California, in which they regain a sense of stability, albeit stability commensurate with impermanence. Along the road, as tenant families become accustomed to the disorder and unpredictability of life on the move, "the highway became their home and movement their medium of expression. Little by little they settled into a new life" (163). Steinbeck portrays the pattern of erecting temporary camps in the evening and dismantling them the next morning as "the technique of building worlds" (194), whereby tenants fall into a routine that mimics their previous lives, re-establishing some of the same conventions of their former societies – developing friendships or animosity, codes of conduct that become "fixed and rigid" (194), that determine duties and responsibilities and rights, and a new social structure. A sense of stability develops, "a kind of insurance" (195); drawn together in their shared plight, families support and care for one another in the face of hunger, illness and death: "the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home was one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream" (193).[16] They are no longer tenant farmers but rather "migrant men" (196), an indication that their homelessness is established in California.

The first of the temporary homes at which the Joads reside in the Golden State is Hooverville, an overcrowded, dirty camp consisting of tents and shacks along the road. While Tom is reluctant to stop here due to the squalor, Pa reminds him that they need to ask for work, a difficulty given the restrictiveness of the camp's management. Here, workers cannot get relief or vote or organise revolts since initiators are promptly jailed. A young man named Floyd Knowles advises Tom to be submissive toward policemen who visit the camp and act "bull-simple" (248), since anyone who attempts to mobilise workers is blacklisted and prevented from finding work elsewhere. The real

[16] The notion of community in the novel, often as a survival mechanism, is prominent, engendered by the migrants' conversion of an "I" mentality to a "we" mentality, as Steinbeck states at the end of chapter 14). This can be seen as indicative of Steinbeck's interest in the "group-man" or "phalanx theory." Throughout the novel there are several instances that demonstrate a sense of solidarity between tenant farmers and other types of workers, starting with the truck driver who gives Tom a lift home; other examples include Mae giving candy to young boys visiting the diner with their father, Ma serving food to other migrant children at Hooverville, the Wilsons who aid the Joads for a portion of their journey (with Sairy Wilson allowing Grampa to rest and eventually die in their tent), the storekeeper who gives Ma a bag of sugar despite her not having enough money and Rose of Sharon's nursing of the starving man at the novel's end.

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inadequacy of Hooverville becomes apparent when a contractor arrives seeking to recruit workers to pick fruit in Tulare County. The episode culminates in a confrontation between Knowles and the recruiter; after Knowles demands a contract, the recruiter sends for a police officer to arrest Knowles on a false charge, after which the Joads depart. The denial of any certainty regarding their wages suggests that home is impossible without economic agency.

Moreover, the arrest, during which Knowles escapes and Casy surrenders himself as the culprit, introduces a series of incidents in which tenants are denied any potential for economic agency by means of physical control being exerted over their movements or activities. One example is the dispersal of handbills advertising picking work which are printed in excess and distributed widely, attracting an overabundance of labourers, allowing landowners to lower wages, which workers, with families to feed and car engines to fill, have no option but to accept. Surplus labour results in short picking seasons and once their labour is no longer needed or their presence becomes unsettling – for many Californians feared a rebellion – workers are coerced into leaving, often by police enforcement. This spatial restriction is also evident when a policeman tells Ma that they need to move on from their camp shortly after arriving in California (chapter 18) because "[w]e don't want you goddamn Okies settlin' down" (215), when the family is forced to take a different road by a group of armed men shortly before their arrival at Weedpatch (chapter 21), and when rioters disrupt the peace at Weedpatch on behalf of the Farmers' Association so that the migrants are denied a stable existence (chapter 24). The restrictions on tenants' spatial liberty contrasts the movement of the landowners and their recruiters, whose capital produces wider spatial access – an indication of their "tourist" status – as the conversation regarding border crossings between a tenant and a tyre salesman indicates:

> Well, California's a big state.
> It ain't that big. The whole United States ain't that big. It ain't big enough. There ain't room enough for you an' me, for your kind an' my kind, for rich and poor together all in one country, for thieves and honest men. For hunger and fat. Whyn't you go back where you come from?
> This is a free country. Fella can go where he wants.
> That's what *you* think! Ever hear of the border patrol on the California line? Police from Los Angeles – stopped you bastards, turned you back. Says, if you can't buy no real estate we don't want you. Says, got a driver's license? Le's see it. Tore it up. Says you can't come in without no driver's no driver's license.
> It's a free country.
> Well, try to get some freedom to do. Fella says you're jus' as free as you got jack to pay for it. (120)

The conversation makes clear that economic agency is a matter of physical freedom. In controlling the movement of tenants, the wealthy and mobile effectively deny tenants entry into certain places

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that would accommodate their desires and assuage their need to keep moving. They determine the nodes around which the tenants' departures and arrivals are constructed, restricting the accessibility of *topoi* that could anchor the tenants' quest, temporarily making time relent, so that Steinbeck's plot is characterised by relatively little improvement in the Joads' circumstances despite their movement. This lack of narrative development suggests that the Joads' movement is purely motion; it never registers as mobility, not in the sense that mobility implies a degree of agency (as it does for landowners) – in this case, economic – so that even their decisions to move or remain are divested of a sense of agency.

Those who manage to survive are those who submit and adapt to the greater progression, as evidenced by the conversation between two tenants, one of whom has become a tractor driver:

> "Three dollars a day. I got damn sick of creeping for my dinner – and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day."
>
> "That's right," the tenant said. "But for your three dollars a day fifteen or twenty families can't eat at all. Nearly a hundred people have to go out and wander on the roads for your three dollars a day. Is that right?"
>
> And the driver said, "Can't think of that. Got to think of my own kids. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day. Times are changing, mister, don't you know? Can't make a living on the land unless you've got two, five, ten thousand and a tractor. Crop land isn't for little guys like us anymore. You don't kick up a howl because you can't make Fords, or because you're not the telephone company. Well, crops are like that now. Nothing to do about it. You try to get three dollars a day someplace. That's the only way." (37)

The necessity of this sort of adjustment to the new farming system is partly what characterises the possibility of the Joads' resettlement as so unlikely, since they seek to re-establish the way of life they practiced in Oklahoma, a fact that becomes increasingly apparent during their stay at a government camp called Weedpatch. A drastic improvement from the impoverishment of Hooverville, Weedpatch is clean and in some ways an improvement even on the Joads' Oklahoma farm as the novelty of flush toilets that scare Ruthie and Winfield suggests. Weedpatch also feels like home; it offers a welcoming, well-organised environment and, in contrast to Hooverville, a sense of community; the kindness shown to them by Jim Rawley, the camp manager, causes Ma to claim that she feels human again. Run by way of democratically elected committees and with no deputies present, Weedpatch affords tenants more freedom than Hooverville, even allowing for entertainment in the form of dances. The family is happy here but, as Ma realises, without land or machinery, the camp cannot guarantee consistent work opportunities for the family. The Joads stay for a month before the work becomes too scarce and supplies run low, and they depart Weedpatch reluctantly.

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In its inadequacy to function as a new home, Weedpatch makes clear the type of settlement the Joads desire. Home would require more than shelter and freedom afforded them at Weedpatch. The Joads' dream is a two-fold one: the dream of private property and the dream of self-sufficiency; a home, as Cruz explains, that allows sustainability and sustenance (66). As farmers, they have a particular relation to place: work and home are inextricably tied in their dream of home ownership. Tenants, we are told, "wanted only two things – land and food; and to them the two were one" (233). Weedpatch, while welcoming and clean, cannot accommodate the American Dream of creating a place for oneself. Accustomed to a way of life in which they live and work on their land, the kind of home the Joads desire is a home comparable to the one they left behind in Oklahoma, a piece of land that they can both inhabit and cultivate. Yet Steinbeck suggests that it is precisely the type of livelihood they desire that has precipitated the deterioration of the land that forced them to leave. As inferences from other narrative voices suggest, the tenants' methods of farming belong to a longstanding history of activity upon the land: a generic tenant recalls that Grampa took the land, killed and drove away Indians, that Pa was born on the land, where he killed weeds and snakes and that California first belonged to Mexicans but was taken by land-hungry Americans.

This historical progression has created a complex understanding of land ownership. Unadjusted to the notion that ownership is now a matter having abstract rights to the land, tenant farmers, who only rent the land they cultivate, consider it theirs because they worked and lived on the land for generations, developed a keen knowledge of and emotional tie to it: "We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours – being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it" (33). The land is now owned by banks and large agricultural corporations that do not want tenants because it would cost less to use modern machinery than to pay tenants' wages. Steinbeck suggests that the tenants' way of relating to place has become obsolete by indicating that ownership dependent on property rights lacks the reverence for the land that constituted ownership derived from experience of the land:

> And when a horse stops work and goes into the barn there is a life and a vitality left, there is a breathing and a warmth, and the feet shift on the straw, and the jaws champ on the hay, and the ears and the eyes are alive. There is a warmth of life in the barn, and the heat and smell of life. But when the motor of a tractor stops, it is as dead as the ore it came from. The heat goes out of it like the living heat that leaves a corpse. Then the corrugated iron doors are closed and the tractor man drives home to town, perhaps twenty miles away, and he need not come back for weeks or months, for the tractor is dead. And this is easy and efficient. So easy that the wonder goes out of the work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of the land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation. For nitrates are not the land, nor phosphates and the length of fiber in the cotton is not the land. Carbon is

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> not a man, nor salt nor water nor calcium. He is all these, but he is much more, much more; and the land is so much more than its analysis. That man who is more than his chemistry, walking on the earth, turning his plow for a stone, dropping his handles to slide over an outcropping, kneeling in the earth to eat his lunch; that man who is more than his elements knows the land that is more than its analysis. But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself. When the corrugated iron doors are shut, he goes home, and his home is not the land. (116-17)

Steinbeck depicts the replacement of an older mode of cultivation, one that depended upon a very close connection to, and reverence for, the land, and with this replacement, the loss of a particular way of being that enabled a sense of being firmly rooted in a particular place, of being at home. This close attachment to the land fostered a sense of identity and caused tenants to conceive of themselves as being part of the land they worked. Hence Noah's claim that his grief for Grampa's passing is no stronger than his grief for leaving Oklahoma. But as Casy explains, "Grampa an' the old place, they was jus' the same thing" and "[h]e died the minute you took 'im off the place" (146), a view that harks back to his earlier comments at the Joad place that a "[f]ella gets use' to a place, it's hard to leave […] Fella gets use' to a way a thinkin', it's hard to leave" (51). Muley agrees, asserting that the "[p]lace where folks live is them folks. They ain't whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car" (52). Yet tenants' holistic and unifying way of life that sustained an almost palpable energy emanating from the land after work and that viewed work as part of a greater life cycle has now been replaced by an approach that is alienating:

> The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was part of the monster, a robot in the seat. The thunder of the cylinders sounded through the country, became one with the air and the earth, so that earth and air muttered in sympathetic vibration. The driver could not control it – straight across the country it went, cutting through a dozen farms and straight back. A twitch at the controls could swerve the cat', but the driver's hands could not twitch because the monster that built the tractor, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hands, into his brains and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, muzzled his protest. He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth. He sat in an iron seat and stepped on iron pedals. He could not cheer or beat or curse or encourage the extension of his power, and because of this he could not cheer or whip or curse or encourage himself. He did not know or own or trust or beseech the land. If a seed dropped did not germinate, it was no skin off his ass. If the young thrusting plant withered in drought or drowned in a flood of rain, it was no more to the driver than to the tractor.
>
> He loved the land no more than the bank loved the land. He could admire the tractor – the machined surfaces, its surge of power, the roar of its detonating cylinders; but it was not his tractor. Behind the tractor rolled the shining disks, cutting the earth with blades – not plowing but surgery, pushing the cut earth. And

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> pulled behind the disks, the harrows combing with iron teeth so that the little clods broke up and the earth lay smooth. Behind the harrows, the long seeders – twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion. The driver sat in his iron seat and he was proud of the straight lines he did not will, proud of the tractor he did not own or love, proud of the power he could not control. And when that crop grew, and was harvested, no man had crumbled a hot clod in his fingers and let the earth sift past his fingertips. No man had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. The land bore under iron, and under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayers or curses. (35-6)

In negative terms, Steinbeck portrays the new mechanised mode of agriculture as decidedly sterile. Working with the inanimate tractor appears to deprive the worker of his human quality. With little concern for the land's productivity, the tractor driver occupies an intermediate position between the land and its cultivation; protected from physical contact with the earth, he has no emotional investment in the harvesting process and is insensible to the results of his labour. Whereas before the worker perceived more than just the physicality of the land, the tractor driver perceives the earth merely as a commodity, valued only in terms of profitable resources. Although he takes pride in the accomplishment of his work, the driver has little control over the process, which constitutes a methodical destructiveness to which the driver is indifferent; the rape imagery suggests the forceful and exploitative nature of the work directed toward the goal of "[m]ak[ing] the land show profit" (38). His disconnection from the work results from the fact that he does not live on the land, while the absence of a truly physical connection to the land is accompanied by a lack of emotional investment as well as an intimate knowledge of the ground he works.

What Steinbeck is describing is a history of expansion, land usurpation and settlement, the passing of time, progress being made, a series of processes set in motion according to principles associated with the American Dream that are subsumed under the notion of creating a place for oneself. The recollection of historical experience indicates that tenant farmers are partly responsible for the deterioration of the land, but ignorant of their role, as seen in their wanting a war to push up cotton prices even though cotton would further destroy the land. This new economy, then, engenders a disaffiliation from the land. Ownership is not a matter of living or even working on the land. Landowners are akin to Bauman's "tourists" who inhabit homogenous spaces because they need never set foot on the land they own. As the narrator explains, "owners no longer worked on their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it" (232). This proprietary relation to land problematises the tenants' quest for home because the fact that there is enough space to accommodate new citizens is futile when that space is off limits: "And along the roads lay the temptations, the fields that could bear food," comments one of the novel's narrative

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voices, and receives the response, "That's owned. That ain't our'n" (235). Confronted with a myriad of seemingly available locations of cultivatable land that seems adequate to accommodate more people, "a thousan' lives we might live" (124), as Ma says, the Joads' quest modulates into a picaresque journey; they spend the last few chapters meanderingly searching for shelter, and have short-lived stays at an orchard and then cotton fields, where they live in a boxcar at Hooper Camp with a family called the Wainwrights.

As Janis P. Stout indicates, critics have often complained that the novel weakens after the Joads enter California (55). As it happens, Steinbeck's narrative loses its initial linear impetus upon entry into the Golden State. The Joads inhabit a number of roadside camps here; false stops that temporarily relieve them of their arduous quest, but which also postpone arrival at a final home. In other words, in terms of the narrative dynamic, these stops are relatable to Brooks's "partial recognitions" in that they provisionally anchor the Joads' movement, but since the family continually arrives at similarly inadequate locations is indicative of the unlikelihood of them ever finding a satisfactory end. Since the chronotope implies the tracing of narrative progression in space, a series of *topoi* should bring about narrative development, that is, improvement in the Joads' circumstances. As such, a series of similarly inadequate *topoi*, each failing to anchor time, brings no development in their condition.

That each new stop in California fails to improve on the previous one demonstrates that none of the narrative resistances are properly worked through; the Joads simply move to a new setting and time simply continues. Time, if anything, becomes burdensome; it brings about no progress, it measures nothing but the continual postponement of arrival at home, for the desire that initiated plot, the desire that time is charged with shaping, dissipates as the narrative moves forwards. The Joads' movement between various camps measures nothing but the stasis of their situation – the entire narrative, starting with Tom's return from jail, is characterised by state of homelessness – suggesting that the central conflict of the narrative remains unresolved. For social progression to be realised requires the availability of places that can accommodate desires but also the continuation of initiatory desire, neither of which happen in Steinbeck's novel. Each temporary home serves as a resistance in the narrative, which the plot is charged with working through. Brooks contends that one of the ways in which resistances in the plot manifest is by means of repetitions. "An event gains meaning by its repetition," he argues, "which is both the recall of an earlier moment and variation of it" (99-100). Each repeated resistance, then, must in some way be an improvement on the previous one, since the satisfaction of narrative desire and the reader's understanding emerges in ever-larger "units" of meaning, seeking totalisation and coherence. In the

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case of the Joads' quest, however, the repetition of roadside camps does not register an improvement of their condition, but rather deterioration thereof.

Entry into California is akin to Gatsby's reunion with Daisy in *The Great Gatsby*: it is the point at which the plot unravels, at which point the realisation of the Dream begins to seem most improbable. Although having made it to California, the Joads are worse off than they were when they set out on their journey from Uncle John's home in Oklahoma even though California turns out, as they had envisioned, as a place of plenty. But the distribution of that plenitude suggests that California only delivers half the dream: it denies the Joads and many other tenants any participation in the benefits of the agriculture. "Eden does indeed exist," suggests Cynthia Golomb Dettelbach, "but its membership is restricted" (74). Steinbeck illustrates the plenitude with this image of budding life in chapter 25:

> The spring is beautiful in California. Valleys in which the fruit blossoms are fragrant pink and white waters in a shallow sea. Then the first tendrils of the grapes swelling from the old gnarled vines cascade down to cover the trunks. The full green hills are round and soft as breasts. And on the level vegetable lands are the mile-long rows of pale green lettuce and the spindly little cauliflowers, the gray-green unearthly artichoke plants.
>
> And then the leaves break out on the trees, and the petals drop from the fruit trees and carpet the earth with pink and white. The centers of the blossoms swell and grow and color: cherries and apples, peaches and pears, figs which close the flower in the fruit. All California quickens with produce, and the fruit grows heavy, and the limbs bend gradually under the fruit so that little crutches must be placed under them to support the weight. (346)

Yet this image of renewal that suggests the promise of a fresh start contrasts with the social realities that the Joads encounter. A place associated with new life, a place meant to save the Joads from their predicament, is instead associated with loss and death: both Granma and Casy die here, while Sairy Wilson falls gravely ill, preventing the Wilsons from continuing further into California with the Joads. Grampa, most reluctant to leave Oklahoma because his identity is tied to the land, does not even make it to California, while at the final home, the cotton fields, Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn baby. The losses force the remaining characters to reconsider their shared vision because even if they find a new place to settle, the homecoming will not include the original party who set out for California. Furthermore, the Joads encounter others along the way who had the same dream but abandoned it. While one man whom they meet at the river shortly before arrival at Hooverville, who has returned from California with his son, warns about the hostility towards "Okies," another at Hooverville alerts them that California is by no means a "lan' of milk an' honey" (251). Such encounters demonstrate the naivety of the Joads' dream.

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The search for a new home becomes less prominent as a group effort once they enter California. Within the larger, unified process of flight there are several individual desires that emerge along the road and become more pronounced after entry into California. As these distinct desires diverge from the shared line of intent that drove the plot forward, resisting the attainment of their ultimate goal and causing the family unit to disintegrate, Steinbeck's narrative undergoes a gradual corrosion of plot, a warping of this shaping operation. Some characters realise the hopelessness of their mission and quit, while others find other pursuits that dominate their initial project. Noah, habitually an outsider in the family, decides to stay behind at the Colorado River, while Al decides to marry Aggie Wainwright. At Hooverville, Connie expresses regret about leaving Oklahoma because of the conditions in which they have to live. Despite Rose of Sharon reminding him of their shared intention – "We got to have a house 'fore the baby comes. We ain't gonna have this baby in no tent" (252) – he abandons his responsibilities towards her and their baby, whom he planned on supporting by first studying radios.

Tom similarly abandons the quest; not because he submits to the implausibility of ever finding a new home, but because he chooses a new goal. At Hooper Camp he commits himself to Casy's mission of mobilising labourers in the aftermath of the preacher's death, as he explains to Ma:

> I'll be all aroun' in the dark. I'll be ever'where – wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an' – I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build – why, I'll be there. (419)

The impression that Tom's words create, that the effect of his work will disseminate, follows on from his adoption of Casy's view, as he describes to Ma, that "a fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of one big one" (419). Casy initially wanted to find direction and purpose – as he tells Tom at the Joad place, "I got the call to lead the people, an' no place to lead 'em to" (21).[17] Having abandoned his former life as a priest, compelled by guilt and the inability to reconcile his responsibility for the spiritual guidance of others and his own physical desires, Casy envisions the road to California as an opportunity to re-establish a leadership role: "Maybe I can preach again. Folks out lonely on the road, folks with no lan', no home to go to. They got to have some kind of home" (56).[18] However, Casy later sacrifices himself at Hooverville by allowing the police to arrest

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[17] Casy has been identified as a type of Christ figure in the novel, supported by his initials, his almost martyr-like sacrificing of himself, his time spent in the wilderness and the fact that his views are realised in others after his death.

[18] Casy's suggestion that his spiritual guidance may serve as some form of home to the migrants implies that for him home constitutes something more or other than a physical shelter. Indeed, the concept of home in Steinbeck's novel is

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him to protect Tom who has broken his parole. During his time spent in prison, Casy decides to commit himself to organising migrant workers.

Casy never envisioned a new home in California as the goal. Rather, he seemed aware of the futility of the attempt – "seems to me we don't never come to nothin'" (127), he declares. His view of the forces of life – that "maybe it's all men an' all women we love; maybe that's the Holy Sperit – the human sperit – the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of" (24) and that [t]here ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's part of the same thing" (23)[19] – come to influence his mission on the road. For Casy, there is no end. Tom had previously questioned Casy's problem of having no place to which to pursue his calling but his very question prefigures both his and Casy's later approaches: "What the hell you want to lead 'em someplace for? Just lead 'em" (21); his suggestion – and his and Casy's later action – can be seen as embodying what Steinbeck called non-teleological thinking: "Non-teleological ideas derive through 'is' thinking […]. Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually is – attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions *what* or *how*, instead of *why*" (*Log* 24, original emphases).

The non-teleological principle is realised in other Joads as well, as the novel's well-known ending suggests. Desperately seeking shelter from the rain after leaving the boxcar, the remaining members of the Joad party arrive at a barn in which they encounter a young boy and his starving father. Rose of Sharon, encouraged by her mother who then ushers the other family members out, suckles the dying man. The open-endedness of the scene, the fact that the reader has no idea of what becomes of the Joads, has seen the novel been criticised for a lack of closure. According to Noël Carroll, narrative closure refers to the end creating the impression of being appropriately placed in the narrative. He defines it as follows:

> The notion of closure refers to the sense of finality with which a piece of music, poem, or a story concludes. It is the impression that exactly the point where the work does end is just the *right* point. To have gone beyond that point would have been an

comprehensive and several critics have developed the many possibilities that Steinbeck makes available. Betty Perez has focuses on the notion of house and home – house as a shelter that comprises a human element embodied in people's lives, particularly embodied by Casy's understanding of a spiritual home, that is, home as family; see "House and Home: Thematic Symbols in *The Grapes of Wrath*," in *The Grapes of Wrath: Text and Criticism* (New York: Penguin, 1977): 840-53. Paul McCarthy has looked at home in terms of the shelter symbol, including the cave (the home of the loner or independent characters, such as Muley on his old farm, Noah at the Colorado river and Tom at Hooper Camp), the house (the shelter of the family) and the shelter of many families; see "House and Shelter as Symbol in *The Grapes of Wrath*," *South Dakota Review* 5 (1967): 48-67. Jan Goggans has done a postcolonial reading of the displacement of tenants, drawing on Homi Bhabha's notion of "the unhomely" to address the disruption of maternal figures' roles in maintaining a stable home life.

[19] A well-known reading of Casy's role in the novel is that of Frederic I. Carpenter, who asserts that Casy's non-teleological approach to life was a synthesis of Emersonian transcendentalism (particularly in relation to the 'oversoul'), Whitmanian democracy and the pragmatism of William James and John Dewey. See "The Philosophical Joads," *College English* 2.4 (1941): 315-325.

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> error. It would have been to have gone too far. But to have stopped before that point would also be to have committed a mistake. It would be too abrupt. […] Closure yields a feeling of completeness. (2, original emphasis)

Narrative closure suggests that at the end of the narrative loose ends will be tied and the reader will not be left wondering. Among the critics were Steinbeck's publishers. Pascal Covici, his editor, wrote to him about this ending in January 1939 after he, Harold Guinzberg, the President of Viking Press, and Marshall Best, Managing Editor, read *The Grapes of Wrath*, and requested that Steinbeck change the ending. Their appeal resonates with Carroll's description, particularly with regard to the timing or placement of the final episode:

> We felt that we would not be good publishers if we failed to point out to you any weaknesses or faults that struck us. One of these is the ending.
> Your idea is to end on a great symbolic note, that life must go on and will go on with a greater love and sympathy and understanding for our fellowmen. Nobody could fail to be moved by the incident of Rose of Sharon giving her breast to the starving man, yet, taken as the finale of such a book with all its vastness and surge, it struck us on reflection as being all too abrupt. It seems to us that the last few pages need building up. The incident needs leading up to, so that the meeting with the starving man is not so much an accident or chance encounter, but more an integral part of the saga. (*Letters* 177)

The impression that the ending is "too abrupt" for the novel's "surge" suggests that the novel undergoes what Brooks terms a "short-circuit" (102), that is, that the narrative has not sufficiently worked through resistances and that the end appears to come at an inappropriate moment. For Brooks, closure refers to the experience of *anagnorisis*, the sense that the narrative has reached a resolved, coherent end; it refers to the arrival at an end which feels like the proper end, an end not attained too soon, leaving the central conflict unsettled. Steinbeck's ending – as his publishers and many critics have argued – does not satisfy the reader's desire, the experience of the narrative reaching an untimely and dissatisfactory ending has jeopardised and ultimately disrupted the progressive dynamic of the plot. However, Steinbeck's response to Covici's letter makes clear the fact that his aim was precisely not to write a novel with a resolved ending that would stand as a grand climax:

> I am sorry but I cannot change that ending. It is casual – there is no fruity climax, it is not more important than any other part of the book – if there is a symbol, it is a survival symbol not a love symbol, it must be an accident, it must be a stranger, and it must be quick. To build this stranger into the structure of the book would be to warp the whole meaning of the book. The fact that the Joads don't know him, don't care about him, have no ties to him – that is the emphasis. The giving of the breast has no more sentiment than the giving of a piece of bread. […] One other thing – I

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> am not writing a satisfactory story. I've done my damndest to rip a reader's nerves to rags, I don't want him satisfied.
>
> And still one more thing – I tried to write this book the way lives are being lived not the way books are written.
>
> […] I know that books lead to a strong climax. This one doesn't except by implication and the reader must bring the implication to it. (*Letters* 178)

Steinbeck's response is an overt rejection of the traditional workings of plot. He makes it clear that he has subjected the demands of plot to the aim of showing how lives are being lived. There can be no closure when the novel maps the continual postponement of arrival at home. The Joads' movement, while for them embodying their dream being kept alive, is really indicative of how elusive their dream is. The type of place that they desire to settle in, one that would afford closure, is one exemplary of a way of life that is obsolete. After leaving Hooper camp, they spend time living in a boxcar, which Stout calls "the very image of movement instead of stability" (56) but which is also an image of the industrial economy that has displaced them and supplanted their way of life, and the reason why they cannot secure their goal of settlement.

With its biblical association, the barn, which may serve as a new temporary home, evokes a new start – an ironic image of America as an Eden to the west. Yet upon entering the barn the Joads find rusted farm tools that recall the older mode of cultivation: a disk plow, a broken cultivator, and an iron wheel, remnants of an older mode that they left behind and searched for, the rusted and abandoned condition thereof indicates that it is now obsolete. As with the end of *Gatsby*, there is a sense that the past has caught up with them and they cannot start anew. Eden is doomed in an increasingly industrial world. The tragedy of the Joads' homelessness is that once all of America was envisioned as a Promised Land; for the Joads, that identification was designated solely to California, the western edge, which they have already reached. Metaphorically, Americans have run out of roads, a predicament Whitman, perhaps, foretold in "Facing West from California's Shores" when he lamented, "But where is what I started for so long ago?/And why is it yet unfound?" (lines 10-11). The prospect of an Eden has, as Tocqueville prophesied, produced an unending cycle of movement and resettlement that pushed back the frontier.

The prospect of a fresh start is an embodiment of the American Dream. Tom alludes to this when he claims that "we gonna start clean! We sure ain't bringin' nothing with us" (230), but he is wrong because the effects of the past have caught up to them – it is impossible to leave the past behind. The securest place they have is in the past; we are reminded of this with the scene in which the generic tenant farmers are preparing for their departure to California. Rummaging through their possessions and the memories that they preserve, they wonder, "How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past?" (88). Some of the principles upon which the American Dream is based, such as that one can leave the past behind and start anew, and that there is always a

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little piece of land further west, are precisely the principles that destroyed the possibility of the Dream's realisation because, when put into practise over centuries in the form of land usurpation and settlement, produced a process that superseded tenant farmers' ways of relating to, and working on, land and prevented the Joads from ever finding a home.

That they fail to settle in the West and are forever reminiscing about the lives they led upon their farm in Oklahoma suggests that if the Dream cannot be realised in the future, the only alternative for dreams to go is toward the past, as both Fitzgerald's and Wolfe's inversion of the Dream's direction indicate. The return signifies the paradoxical nature of the Dream and explains why all the characters' dreams end with nostalgia. The irony of the Dream is the power that the past wields over the present; while the Dream is based in part on the idea that the past can be erased, that it poses no threat to social mobility, the reality is that the past is ever-present in all attempts at reestablishment. It is present in the existence of well-established families of East Egg, in the tenant farmers' attachment of their livelihood to their identity, and George Webber's desire for a secure society, which takes him to Europe (as will be discussed in the following chapter). The return that attempts to recapture, or find remnants of, the past is an inversion of the aspirations of Tocqueville's American, who looks to the future, and certainly also of the operations of plots, which are teleological and forward-moving.

Moreover, the longing for home as expressed by Ma Joad – "They was the time when we was on the lan'" (393) – points toward the novel's depiction of the way in which people are no longer securely based or rooted in a place. Instead, people are on the move, owing to developments that became more pronounced in the latter half of the nineteenth century up to the Great Depression. These include the breakdown of a rural economy, with the division between rural and urban becoming less distinct – the result of increased work opportunities taking people into the cities – as well as the use of certain modes of transport; automobiles became more popular in rural communities, while railways connected towns and cities. The Depression also had global repercussions that impacted on mobility. Many countries besides America suffered great unemployment. In Germany, this contributed, to some extent, to the increased support for the anti-capitalist Nazi party, which set in motion circumstances that led to the Second World War. These developments – the increase in urbanisation, the proliferation and streamlining of modern transport, the more global economy, and the build-up to world war – are central issues that will be looked at in the following discussion of Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again*.

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CHAPTER THREE

"We've Gone Places We Didn't Mean to Go": Misdirected Desire in *You Can't Go Home Again*

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald depicts the prosperous and optimistic years following the First World War (from which both Nick Carraway and Gatsby return). The novel highlights material excess and post-war restlessness; it was the period, according to Fitzgerald, when "something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War" ("Echoes" 130). The novel ends with a meditation on the American Dream, with Nick pointing out that the notion of America as the home of unlimited opportunity has long since expired. The diminishment of opportunity is, of course, central to Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath;* he similarly demonstrates the elusiveness of desired ends by sending his Joads towards a West that has been parcelled out, taken over by corporations, and thus no longer a realm that fosters a close dependence on the land, as it had done for the tenant farmers' forebears. In keeping with his initial journalistic aims, the novel is a gravely realistic depiction of the effects of the market crash during the Dust Bowl period. Both novels would later be seen as epitomising the respective decades in which they appeared; Fitzgerald's demonstrating the reckless materialism that preceded the market crash of 1929, Steinbeck's exposing the severe effects thereof on displaced workers.

Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* relates to the themes of both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Grapes of Wrath* in that the story of George Webber covers the last months of 1929 and stretches well into the Depression years, illustrating both the immoderation of the twenties and the desperation and anxiety of the thirties; hence the great length of Wolfe's text. In addition, it takes the market crash, which sent America and much of the rest of the world into an economic downturn, and which connects Fitzgerald's era to Steinbeck's, as a central event in the novel. Wolfe recognised the crash as a watershed moment not only for America, but for him personally, and it produces the same response in Webber. The release of Webber's first novel, *Home to Our Mountains*, coincides with the crash, appearing amidst national anxiety and uncertainty. The atmosphere is ominous; while the autobiographical nature of the work offends many of the residents of his hometown who recognise fictionalised versions of themselves in Webber's scathing account of life in a small town, he feels that he failed to create a work that was autobiographical enough.

The use of autobiographical fiction – and the belief that fiction had to be dictated by reality – is not Webber's alone, but also Wolfe's: he considered writing to be significantly dependent on personal experiences. He believed that he, the artist, was tasked with applying form to the material he gathered from everyday life and, through its arrangement, giving it meaning as a work of fiction;

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as he described in the preface to *Look Homeward, Angel*: "fiction is fact arranged and charged with meaning" (n. pag.). Webber's aim is similarly to render a truthful depiction of American life – he had thus "distilled every line of [his first novel] out of his own experience of life" (26). Webber, however, experiences particular difficulty with this attempt at ordering in the wake of the crash, as he explains to his friend Randy:

> '[…] I've got too much material. […] I wonder how I'm going to find a frame for it, a pattern, a channel, a way to make it flow! […] 'I'm looking for a way,' he said at last. 'I think it may be something like what people vaguely mean when they speak of fiction. A kind of legend, perhaps. Something – a story – composed of all the knowledge I have, of all the living I've seen. Not the facts, you understand – not just the record of my life – but something truer than the facts – something distilled out of my experience and transmitted into a form of universal application. That's what the best fiction is, isn't it?' (354)

Webber is suggesting that not only should his work reflect his own sense of reality, but that it should resonate with others too, that it should be reflective of the general experience of all people. The notion that the artist selects and arranges material, and that the work gains meaning from this arrangement, highlights Wolfe's decision to organise *You Can't Go Home Again* so as to incorporate the nineteen-twenties, the market crash and the nineteen-thirties. As the section that covers the crash and its aftermath, "An End and a Beginning," suggests, the crash represents a type of dividing line; it marks the end towards which people in the nineteen-twenties were moving and introduces the result of that progression during the Depression years. It is worth thinking about how the aim of producing fiction that is true to life and that has such scope as Wolfe's work – a result of the attempt to encapsulate all of America – would impact on the plotting of George Webber's quest for fame and an order to impose on his material to create his own all-inclusive accounts of American life.

The order that the narrative takes in mapping these three stages follows Webber's movement as he seeks to fulfil his dream of fame and finding ways of ordering his material: the months leading up to the crash focus on his anticipation of the release of his first novel, his return to his hometown of Libya Hill, which is undergoing extensive changes due to real estate development; the crash prompts him to move to Brooklyn, and he spends a number of years there before moving to Europe, spending time in both England and Germany. What is particularly important to Wolfe's gaining real-life experiences is the need to travel and he conferred the same desire to journey onto his protagonist who in turn moves through an extremely mobile society, as the novel's first description of travel makes clear:

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> For here, as nowhere else on earth, men were brought together for a moment at the beginning or end of their innumerable journeys, here one saw their greetings and farewells, here, in a single instant, one got the entire picture of the human destiny. Men came and went, they passed and vanished, and all were moving through the moments of their lives to death, all made small tickings in the sound of time – but the voice of time remained aloof and unperturbed, a drowsy and eternal murmur below the immense and distant roof.
>
> Each man and woman was full of his own journey. He had one way to go, one end to reach, through all the shifting complexities of the crowd. For each it was *his* journey, and he cared nothing about the journeys of the others. (51, original emphasis)

As a point of arrival and departure that brings together people from diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds, the station is a source of limitless material. The image of these travellers all going about their own journeys, focused entirely on their individual projects, but against the incessant passage of time, indicates that these travellers are all moving towards death; its inevitability indicates that they are going about their endeavours only to ultimately be defeated by time. Webber, for one, is driven by knowledge of time's passage: "time goes by!" he exclaims; "Time gets away from me before I know that it has gone!" – time, we are told, is his "enemy" (355). The image of numerous travellers all projecting their desires against the passage of time suggests some form of organisation of time, the establishment of departures, arrivals and deadlines, at which point certain activities should be completed. It evokes the way in which time gets plotted and charged with purpose, so that these individualised journeys represent one way in which life tends to be narrativised.

This idea of life being plotted against the flow of time may be related to Peter Brooks's theory of narrative dynamic, particularly the idea that the meaning in narrative is produced in time. Plot is "a logic which makes sense of succession and time" (10); it is the process of shaping meanings in time. Plot makes use of time since it takes time to move through the narrative, and narrative, Brooks argues, is "one of the large categories or systems of understanding that we use in our negotiations with reality, specifically, in the case of narrative, with the problem of temporality" (xi). From this perspective, it could be argued that Webber's quest for fame and a pattern for his material is essentially a quest for order. Fame certainly represents a desired end, a form of recognition, while the desire to order is similarly a form of *anagnorisis* in so far as it implies, in terms of Brooks's theory, a type of coherence. Plot disciplines time, and thus time impacts on order – time should be disciplined by plot so as to produce a perceptible relation between narrative starts and endings.

Webber's quest for fame and narrative order is essentially a search, in part, for plot. Brooks's theory of narrative dynamic certainly applies to Webber's view that he requires movement

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so as to create order and produce meaning. When notified that his manuscript has been accepted by a publisher, having previously been told that "[t]he novel form is not adapted to such talents as you have" (22), Webber "thought that now, perhaps, he could begin to *shape* his life to *mastery*, for he felt a sense of new direction deep within him, but whither it would take him he could not say" (13, emphases added). From a perspective informed by Brooks, this quote suggests that Webber believes himself to finally be in a position to realise his dream, to reach a coherent end.

This explanation of Webber's intention introduces the fact that the novel depicts aspirations as relying on the metaphorics of the journey. We are told, for instance, that the town's recognition of his upcoming novel "made [Webber] happy now to know that the people of his home town believed he had got it, or at any rate was at last on the *highroad* to it" (120, emphasis added). Furthermore, Webber considers the desire for movement to be characteristically American – for him, movement is an expression of their purpose:

> Perhaps this is our strange and haunting paradox here in America – that we are fixed and certain only when we are in movement. At any rate, that is how it seemed to young George Webber, who was never so assured of his purpose as when he was going somewhere on a train. And he never had the sense of home so much as when he felt that he was going there. It was only when he got there that his homelessness began. (58)

Webber is forced to face the prospect of homelessness upon his arrival at Libya Hill, which he returns to in order to attend his Aunt Maw's funeral, and which appears to be on the verge of ostensibly auspicious change. Although Webber desires to see the town as he remembers it, he is confronted with "the sudden realization of Time's changes" (57), a point made overt by the blind Judge Bland, a former lawyer notorious for acquiring great wealth by usuriously exploiting the town's African-American population. Bland makes Webber uncomfortable and, although he has no reason to feel so, guilty by gloatingly questioning him about the prospect of his homecoming:

> 'So you're going down to bury her.' It was a statement, and he said it reflectively, as though meditating upon it; then – 'And do you think you can go home again?'
>
> Webber was a little startled and puzzled: 'Why – I don't understand. How do you mean, Judge Bland?'
>
> There was another flare of that secret, evil laughter. 'I mean, do you think you can really go *home* again?' Then, sharp, cold, peremptory – 'Now answer me! Do you think you can?'
>
> 'Why – why yes! Why –' the young man was desperate, almost frightened now, and, earnestly, beseechingly, he said – 'why look here, Judge Bland – I haven't done anything – honestly I haven't!' (83, original emphasis)

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Bland's question introduces the challenge that Webber will encounter upon his arrival, which makes clear the notion of time as an impediment to the process of ordering, or attaining the desired end; it is increasingly difficult to fix, to arrive, in the face of changes brought on by time, which only exacerbate Webber's sense of homelessness. In the chapter "Boom Town," he encounters a town surging with the success of real estate, with property ownership continually and rapidly changing. Historically a mountain town, Libya Hill has been extended into the surrounding wilderness, while the town centre, once the location of lawns and trees, is being replaced by a massive hotel of steel and concrete. The more perplexing change, however, appears to be in the townspeople, who are overcome by frenzied and incomprehensible ambition that has seen many become involved in real estate speculation. Among them is Mrs Delia Flood, an attendee to Aunt Maw's funeral and "a woman of property" whose "favourite topic was real estate" (96). While visiting the cemetery with Webber and Margaret, Randy's sister, Mrs Flood complains about the site of the cemetery which is too "valuable" (100) for its current purpose, asserting that the best building sites in town are given to the dead and the African-American community.

Mrs Flood's claims about urban development introduce the difference between property as alienable goods, on the one hand, and home as a place of belonging on the other. Her dismissal of the necessity of the gravesite gains particular gravity in view of her recollection of Webber's uncle transferring Webber's mother after she was buried in her husband's family's burial plot. Similar to Steinbeck's tenant farmers' desire for a piece of land, Wolfe conceptualises home as embodied by family ties, family history and a sense of belonging. However, familial relations are shown to be superseded by property rights, as Webber discovers when he encounters a childhood friend, Sam Pennock. Now a real estate agent, Sam expresses interest in buying Webber's uncle's house. Such dissociation from ties to the past is, of course, something that is identified with the American Dream, insofar as the Dream suggests that the past does not matter in realising one's aspirations. That Aunt Maw's death coincides with Webber's impression that he is in a position to realise his dream is symbolic. Her death causes a disconnection between him and his family, for Aunt Maw was the only blood relative still remaining, so that his quest commences with a disconnection of ties to his past – as with Jay Gatsby's reinvention of himself, this severance is identifiable with the orphan myth. However, instead of this dissociation suggesting a sense of promise or enabling opportunity, Webber's adaptation to his aunt's death as being comparable to "a grimly dutiful American tourist who, on arriving at a new town, looks around him, takes his bearings, and says, 'Well, where do I go from here?'" (50), suggests instead that it causes a sense of disorientation.

In the case of Libya Hill, the residents' obdurate pursuits seem a result of social mobility having become imperative. This is evidenced by Randy's experience working at a sales organisation referred to quite generically as "the Company" (124) that works "under the name of 'vision'" (126).

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Randy's boss, Mr David Merrit, gives the impression of unlimited possibilities within the market, and explains that they are able to sell well because "[they] create the need" (127). Randy is anxious; struggling to cope with his work, he is later berated by Merrit for underperforming. Webber learns of the Company's policy of rewarding their employees' sales performance through promotion and inclusion in an exclusive society called the "Hundred Club" (128), along which employees move according to their performances. Merrit talks about the extravagant privileges, both financial and social, of belonging, and there is great pressure to belong and to move up quickly; one is expelled and forgotten if guilty of underperforming, for "[o]ne had to go onwards and upwards constantly" (129). Merrit's view is that of many residents – that the possibilities for social mobility are endless.

However, that many of the town's projects involve speculation reflects the uncertainty of their projections. While the term denotes directing desires towards a projected outcome, investment entails both the hope of gain *and* the risk of loss, so that the realisation of their plans is not guaranteed – if their plans are not realised, they fail to move. Due to the uncertainty of its realisation, social mobility is attended by a sense of indeterminacy. This uncertainty is apparent when Sam, overcome with anxiety, wonders what the desperate need to profit signifies; his question, "What are we coming to?" (117) is an interesting echoing of the petrol attendant's enquiry to Tom Joad, and indicates his anxiety about the impending end. In implementing their plans, however, the town resorts merely to change, which Webber recognises as not necessarily translating into progress:

> They were always talking of the better life that lay ahead of them and of the greater city they would build, but to Webber it seemed that in all such talk there was evidence of a strange and savage hunger that drove them on, and that there was a desperate quality in it, as though what they really hungered for was ruin and death. It seemed to him that they *were* ruined, and that even when they laughed and shouted and smote each other on the back, the knowledge of their ruin was in them.
>
> They had squandered fabulous sums in meaningless streets and bridges. They had torn down ancient buildings and erected new ones large enough to take care of a city of half a million people. They had levelled hills and bored through mountains, making magnificent tunnels paved with double roadways and glittering with shining tiles – tunnels which leaped out on the other side into Arcadian wilderness. They had flung away the earnings of a lifetime, and mortgaged those of a generation to come. They had ruined their city, and in doing so had ruined themselves, their children, and their children's children.
>
> Already the town had passed from their possession. They no longer owned it. (135, original emphasis)[20]

[20] Wolfe's own feelings about the changes in Asheville prefigure Webber's astonishment; in a letter to Aline Bernstein, c. 1925, he wrote: "I am just back from Boom Town, where everyone is full of Progress and Prosperity and Enterprise, and 100,000 by 1930, and Bigger and Greater Ashville. Everyone is growing wealthy on real estate, and there is a general tendency to slap everyone on the back and call everyone by the first name" (*Letters* 49).

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Webber's claim that the Libya Hill residents no longer own the land refers, of course, to the selling of property to outsiders, so that the residents no longer own property that had been in their families' possession for generations. Such disownment then relates not merely to the transference of property but it also produces a sense of alienation from one's "own," or sense of self. The desperation inherent in their commercial endeavours echoes Henry David Thoreau's observation in *Walden* that, in pursuit of material gain, people no longer control their labour or own their possessions, but that their labour and possessions own them: "men have become the tools of their tools" (1891). Thus the excess that the town recognises as development or progress transpires as a sacrifice of the future.

That the townspeople are driven by the fear of their inevitable deaths resonates with Tocqueville's claim that Americans grasp at material pleasures as though in fear that they will not have lived until they have enjoyed them (512). Ironically that fear inhibits the ability to fully grasp and relish these enjoyments. Thus, many of their developments seem counter-progressive. Thoreau also seems an apt reference in view of the residents' awareness of inevitable ruin: Wolfe writes that "under all this flash and play of great endeavour, the paucity of their designs and the starved meagreness of their lives were already apparent" (135) – the poverty of life of the Libya Hill residents calls to mind Thoreau's observation that "[t]he mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation" (1875). Despite the sense of impending fortune that permeates the town, Webber senses the town's inevitable ruin; he comes to see their materialistic aspirations as symptoms of greed, "some secret and unholy glee" (107), and dismisses the developments as "[a] spirit of drunken waste and wild destruction" (108). Webber's observations are in agreement with Tocqueville's earlier assertion that the quest for material gain transpires in a series of attainments. However, that their insatiability causes, as Webber sees it, so much damage makes it questionable whether they in fact attain anything.

Initially, Webber's own desire for success is presented as an inherent quality in his countrymen; as the narrator explains, "[l]ike all Americans, George had been amorous of material success" (120). Having not returned to Libya Hill for several years and still "only an obscure instructor" at a university in New York, Webber is uneasy about arriving without having attained the dream which took him away from the town in the first place – he cannot yet be deemed, by the town's standards, "a success" (88). However, his disregard for being misrepresented by a journalist mirrors the misguided ambitions he encounters in the town; he nevertheless feels that he is now a writer and no longer a young man full of hopes because "in the eyes of his own people he had 'arrived'" (120-21). However, while Webber had previously identified his desire for success as belonging to a broader cultural tendency, he fails to see the connection between his own misguided desire for fame and those of the Libya Hill residents. This raises the question of how Webber's desire for fame and material success relates to that of finding an order for his work.

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The complexity of Webber's desire is demonstrated in "Book Two," which is focused on the party of Esther Jack, his lover who works as a theatre designer. Scheduled a week before the market crash, the party is interrupted by a fire that serves as a foreboding representation of the economic crisis and its aftermath. Wolfe accomplishes this representativeness by presenting the Jacks' apartment building as symbolic of the country by demonstrating the spatial, architectural organisation of class difference. With the image of the wealthy guests gathered high up in the Jacks' apartment and the workmen in the street down below, his critique of the class system emerges through the conversation between elevator men Herbert Anderson and John Enborg. When John relates that a few nights earlier, he was approached outside the building by someone asking for money, he claims that "[t]hey got no right to bother the kind of people we got here" (188), suggesting that people loiter around to play on the residents' sympathy, and the narrator infers that they should "be protected and preserved" (188). Herbert, however, claims that the residents never work and that it is *they* who loiter without any purpose.

As Richard Cracroft observes, John represents the defenders of the established order because he believes the wealthy should be guarded (544). As he declares, "Don't you know the kind of people we got here don't want every Tom, Dick, and Harry with a package to deliver runnin' up in the front elevator all the time, mixin' in with all the people in this house?" (198). When Henry, the doorman, warns John that he will be killed by a Rolls Royce belonging to one of the residents, he provides a foreboding hint that the wealthy will cause the demise of the worker. Henry's warning materialises when the fire breaks out; both John and Herbert perish in the blaze after being trapped in an elevator which is stalled when a tenant decides to switch on a light to view a staircase he had not seen before. That the wealthy remain unharmed during the crisis is reflective of them occupying a state of stability and permanence in that they never part familiar ground. A character illustrative of this is Mr Jack, who associates economic power with architectural stability: after he has woken up, he contemplates the city from his apartment window, the "steel-walled security" (144) for which he paid and was "made to last" (145). For him "[e]very cloud-lost spire of masonry was a talisman of power, a monument to the everlasting empire of American business. It made him feel good for that empire was his faith, his fortune, and his life. He had a *fixed* place in it" (149-50, emphasis added). He then considers all his life's privileges, including his fine clothing, expensive sports, the company he keeps and membership to exclusive clubs. His mobility is expressed in terms of access, as is that of Amy Carlton, a guest at Esther's party:

> In this she was the child of her own time. Her life expressed itself in terms of speed, sensational change, and violent movement, in a feverish tempo that never drew from

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> its own energies exhaustion or surcease, but mounted constantly to insane excess. She had been everywhere and 'seen everything' – in the way one might see things from the windows of an express train travelling eighty miles an hour. And, having quickly exhausted the conventional kaleidoscope of things to be seen, she had long since turned to an investigation of things more bizarre and sinister and hidden. Here, too, her wealth and powerful connexions opened doors to her which were closed to other people. (233)

Amy's mobility as encapsulated by the phrase "been everywhere and 'seen everything'" (233) is evocative of Daisy Buchanan, who uses the exact words to describe the scope of her experiences to Nick Carraway. Like Daisy, Amy has a reputation for driving recklessly. Despite wrecking a car and killing a passenger, she still maintains privileges with the police. That her experience is expressed in terms of kinesis is an illustration of the extent of her mobility; born into her wealth, she has always had extensive spatial access, which identifies her social position as relatable to Zygmunt Bauman's "tourist."

Of course, the apparently secure position of the likes of the Jacks and Amy Carlton rests on the presence of others. For the most part, the wealthy appear to be unaware of those who work and move in close proximity to them, as evidenced by their absent-mindedness regarding the underground railways that pass beneath the apartment building, only recalling it when they feel tremors. Many of the residents think approvingly of these trains carrying workers into the city because they recognise it as part of the economic system that upholds the country, but they are not as cognizant of the symbolism of workers *literally* moving around below them. When tremors are felt, "some of [the residents] reflected with immense satisfaction on the cleverness with which New York had reserved an order that is fixed and immutable everywhere else in America, and had made it fashionable to live, not merely 'beside the tracks', but on top of them" (187). What they fail to recognise is that their positions are being sustained by the labour of those "below" them. The tremors may remind the wealthy residents of their secure positions, but, of course, they call to mind the "ominous preliminary tremors to give warning of the crash that was to come" (333) and thus indicate that the economy is not stable and that the nation is on the verge of a great change.

The response of those in power to the market crash is foreshadowed by the aftermath of the fire. Amidst this chaos of the blaze, the narrator celebrates the solidarity of the various occupants of the building. Gathered outside are residents and passers-by of diverse ethnic backgrounds, occupations and classes. Their composition is regarded as quintessentially American; "an extraordinary conglomeration – a composite of classes, types, and characters that could have been found nowhere else save in a New York apartment house such as this" (271). Drawing on this diverse assembly, Jon Dawson argues that "[t]he apartment house serves as a representation of America" (48). The fire temporarily dissolves class distinctions and other barriers that generally

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prevent the residents from relating to one another; they "began to show a spirit of fellowship such as that enormous beehive of life had never seen before. People who, at other times, had never so much as deigned to nod at each other were soon laughing and talking together with the familiarity of long acquaintance" (276). But once the fire has been extinguished, the previous order is re-established: residents are heard ordering their servants again and, as people return to their apartments, they feel embarrassed about their earlier displays of emotion and concern.

What disturbs Webber is the casual recommencement of their lives in the face of such tragedy. Many of the wealthy residents, unharmed by the blaze, find amusement in the event; Esther, ignorant that Herbert and John have died, exclaims that the fire made for an exciting evening, while some of her guests suspect it may have been an extension of Piggy Logan's act. Her party represents the unreasonable waste and spending that prefigured the crash. That the party distracts them from the severity of the tragedy suggests that her guests are at play, for, as George Hovis argues, Esther's party is no more than "a frivolous diversion, a distraction from life's real human drama" (41). The wealthy residents exemplify those who, leading up to the crash and even in its wake, resumed their lives as though nothing had happened. What troubles Webber is that the wealthy create their own version of events and turn a blind eye to undesirable facts. Their false sense of security is partly to blame for this and it registers as a tendency to deny the truth. In this case, the Jacks are representative; businessmen, the narrator informs us, are like theatre people – they did not see the crash coming, in great measure because they deny certain social realities.

The manner in which the wealthy and privileged choose to ignore certain circumstances causes Webber to recognise the danger that privilege holds for his authorial role. Webber is aware that privilege may distort the truth since the wealthy may only want to acknowledge that which does not endanger their position in society. He comes to think that privilege will compromise his convictions and distort his view of the truth as it has done to them, endangering the artist's mission and preventing him from writing well. The strangeness and inappropriateness of the trivial party followed by the fatal fire is not lost on Webber, who is driven to change his own course not only because the fire reminds him of the precariousness of life, but also because it forces him to reconsider his integrity as an artist. The disregard shown by some residents only confirms the insincerity that Webber senses among Esther's guests, for whom he feels scorn because he senses that they have created their own versions of the truth. For example, Lawrence Hirsch, a banker, is an ardent critic of the class to which he belongs, yet has made his fortune from child labour in the South. Webber resents this type of hypocrisy but, upon seeing another guest, Mr Ettinger, who had arrived with both his wife and his mistress, Webber realises that he himself, as Esther's lover, is enjoying a privileged social position based on lies.

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Although he had aspired to move among this company, Webber recognises his own hypocrisy among these people, and ultimately rejects class privilege since it threatens the vision he has of himself as a writer by compelling him to question the legitimacy of the class structure, the order that produces these privileged positions that hinder the artistic rendering of truth. He thinks of other writers who "had begun as seekers after truth, but had suffered some eclipse of vision and had ended as champions of some special and limited brand of truth" (245-46), and decides that he cannot be distracted by privilege, for "[i]f it happened to him," the narrator asks, "how, then, could he sing America?" (246). Webber's view is that the artist ought to render, in somewhat Whitmanian fashion, an all-encompassing truth of the experience of America. Thus, Webber's desire to write forces him to reject Esther and her company:

> He thought about the work he wanted to do. Somehow the events which he had witnessed here tonight had helped to resolve much of his inner chaos and confusion. Many of the things which had been complex before were now made simple. And it all boiled down to this: honesty, sincerity, no compromise with truth – those were the essentials of any art – and a writer, no matter what else he had, was just a hack without them.
>
> And that was where Esther and this world of hers came in. In America, of all places, there could be no honest compromise with special privilege. Privilege and truth could not lie down together. He thought of how a silver dollar, if held close enough to the eye, could blot out the sun itself. There were stronger, deeper tides and currents running in America than any which these glamorous lives tonight had ever dreamed of. Those were the depths that he would like to sound. (296-97)

Webber's key observation here is that there are other *currents* in America – there are developments or circumstances in which people find themselves, and that the state of the wealthy does not encapsulate the state of the country. While the crash represents "[a]n [e]nd and a [b]eginning," what upsets him and forces him to re-evaluate his artistic duty is the fact that some choose to continue as before, as though nothing has changed. The country's leaders, for example, "meant to reassure themselves that nothing now was really changed, that things were as they always had been, and as they always would be" (300). The crash also forces Webber to confront the complexity of his own ambition; it raises the question of how he should relate his desire for fame to the effort of ordering his experience so as to produce fiction that is truthful to the common experience of others.

Webber identifies this problem as the *tension* between two aspects of his being. One he calls "Man-Creating" (325), the view of himself as an artist who can create work with a clear conscience, distancing himself from other men. The other is "Man-Alive" (325), which positions Webber as a fellow member of society who feels an affinity towards or a sense of solidarity with others. As Man-Creating, Webber suggests that he occupies a position in society superior to those of other men when he shares his artistic ideals with Randy:

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> Webber began to talk now about 'the artist', spouting all the intellectual and aesthetic small change of the period. The artist, it seemed, was a kind of fabulous, rare, and special creature who lived on 'beauty' and 'truth' and had thoughts so subtle that the average man could comprehend them no more than a mongrel could understand the moon he bayed at. The artist, therefore, could achieve his 'art' only through a constant state of flight into some magic wood, some promise of enchantment. (351)

He suggests that the artist, who enjoys a privileged position as someone who can perceive facts that others are blind to, is able to attain his art – that is, an order for his material – but that he is then fated to ongoing movement; the artist can never settle. As an artist, Webber claims that he is fated to chase a place which promises to fulfil his desire. This is in agreement with Tocqueville's prediction that the American will always desire to leave, although Webber's choice of the word "flight" adapts Tocqueville's more neutral use of "depart" to evoke a more desperate pursuit; indeed, Wolfe's novel opens with the urgency of words like "escape" (12) and "fleeing" (13). But the artist as someone in flight is in conflict with the artist as one who accurately and impartially renders the life around him in his work. As Randy points out to Webber, he is incorrect in believing that one is either an artist or a member of society, claiming instead that he is both. He expresses his belief that the artist should write about the life he knows, but adds that regardless of this task, he is still a member of society. More accurately, as Esther points out to him when she tries to convince him to attend her party, it is precisely because he believes in writing about the life he knows that, as an artist, he is a member of society: "And how can you expect to be a writer if you don't take part in the life round you?" (142), she asks.

Randy's encouragement that Webber should apply his art while being more socially involved and the wording of Webber's distinction between the two aspects of his self, call to mind Ralph Waldo Emerson's identification of "Man Thinking." In his 1837 essay "The American Scholar," Emerson argued that men were fragmentary beings, all subsumed under mankind "as the hand was divided into fingers" (1138), who occupied one of two states. In the "divided" state (1138), man identifies with his occupation to the extent that he no longer possesses himself and is reduced to an instrument of his work: "[t]he priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of the ship" (1139). The other is "the right state" in which the scholar becomes "Man Thinking," who is a more holistic being, and one who discloses the truth through experience: "Action is with the scholar subordinate, but it is essential. Without it, he is not yet man. Without it thought cannot ripen into truth" (1143).[21] The correlation between Webber's

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[21] As George Hovis suggests, "[Wolfe] might also have had in mind Emerson's belief, as expressed in 'The Poet,' that the poet – or, more generally, the writer – is 'representative. He stands among partial men for the complete man'" (38).

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ambition and Emerson's identification of "Man Thinking" suggests that truth can only be revealed through an engagement with others.

The realisation of his aim as an artist prompts Webber to move to Brooklyn, after which he begins to identify himself as a fellow member of society and becomes more involved in the life around him. We are told that "it was only gradually, in the course of the years to come, that he began to realize how the changes in himself were related to the larger changes in the world around him" (300). Spending much of his time walking through the city, particularly at night, Webber observes and talks to homeless and unemployed men and finds himself intrigued by their existence. He no longer thinks of himself as an artist as superior to other men, that is, he

> no longer thought of himself as a rare and special person who was doomed to isolation, but as a man who worked and who, like other men, was a part of life. He was concerned passionately with reality. He wanted to see things whole, to find out everything he could, and then to create out of what he knew the fruit of his vision. (375-76)

The solidarity he feels towards the homeless is analogous to his own homelessness – he has broken almost all personal ties, he has not attained his dream and settled, and is in an indeterminate state in which to re-evaluate his purpose as an artist.

Ironically, it is the homeless, the unemployed or the average, struggling citizens who are most hopeful about the future. It is through observing them in the streets that Webber, earlier in the novel, recognises a sense of purpose and commitment lacking in his own life:

> The power and precision with which they worked stirred in George a deep emotion of respect, and also touched him with humility. For whenever he saw it, his own life, with its conflicting desires, its uncertain projects and designs, its labours begun in hope and so often ended in incompletion, by comparison with the lives of these men who had learned to use their strength and talents perfectly, seemed faltering, blind, and baffled. (42)

Webber at first only admired the movement of workers in the city streets of New York from his apartment windows, considering that "they had had the city's qualities stamped into their flesh and movement, distilled through all their tissues, etched with the city's acid into their tongue and brain and vision. […] Their pulse beat with the furious rhythm of the city's stroke […]. Their souls were like the asphalt visages of city streets" (41). His respect for the working class in his attempt to "sing America" echoes Whitman's celebration of the common occupations of Americans in "I Hear America Singing." The view of the city that Webber develops from walking through it is different

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from his earlier detached view from the apartment window. Walking allows him to acquire material from the insights that he had previously been ignorant of.

The street as a particular *topos* enables an engagement with numerous types of people, and thus allows the entry into a multitude of lives that Webber regards as necessary for his art. Walking as a particular experience that allows this revelation of otherwise unseen experiences is discussed by Michel de Certeau in his essay, "Walking in the City," in which he posits walkers as those who bring life to the city. Published in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, "Walking in the City" presents "a rhetoric of walking" (99). De Certeau begins by describing his view from the top of the World Trade Center, a vantage point that, he contends, presents a complete picture of the city as ordered through urban planning. However, the truly lived experience of the city is to be encountered not from a "totalizing eye" (92), but rather through the meandering experience of citizens navigating the city streets. For de Certeau, pedestrian movements are the forces which give life to the city. What is more, walking is "*an opaque and blind* mobility characteristic of the bustling city" (93, original emphases). His view resonates with the earlier description of the *flâneur*, although de Certeau's focus is not an exclusive individual, but rather the ordinary citizens:

> The ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below,' below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; […]. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (93)

What de Certeau describes is movement that is without an order, movement that is distinct from the mainstream experience of the city and comprising continually changing routes of experience. This movement evades visibility and thus any form of control. De Certeau presents movement as a kind of narrative; that the experience of walking presents "a manifold story" (93) is analogous to Wolfe's description of the train station as offering "innumerable journeys" (51). Indeed, the experience of walking provides Webber with extensive material for his work – through walking he gains access into the other "currents" he sought to render in his work upon his rejection of Esther's company. De Certeau's claim that walking allows the formation or organisation of a type of narrative, that walking creates meaning, is commensurate with Webber's aim of producing narratives through movement. His practice enables a wide-ranging engagement with and a lived experience of multiple people. It contrasts with the exclusive, but limited and detached, perspectives of Mr Jack and Webber from their apartment windows, which are closer to de Certeau's totalising view from the

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top of the World Trade Center. It is, however, precisely the lack of order in Brooklyn that eventually problematises Webber's quest to create a new novel. In the transforming state of affairs he finds a challenge to his attempt at ordering his gathered material into a novel:

> Ever since his first book had been published he had been looking for a way to form and shape his next. Now he thought that he had found it. It was not *the* way, perhaps, but it was *a* way. The hundreds and thousands of separate and disjointed notes that he had written down had fallen at last into a pattern in his mind. He needed only to weave them all together, and fill in the blanks, and he would have a book. He felt that he could do this final job of organization and revision better if he made a clean break in the monotony of his life. New scenes, new faces, and new atmospheres might clear his head and sharpen his perspective. (467, original emphases)

When Webber recommences his quest, he does so feeling that, while he has learned a great deal about America over the past four years, he in fact needs distance from his homeland, which finds itself "in such a state of flux, in such a prophetic condition of becoming" (467). The state America finds itself in would actually counter his aim of organising his material into a novel. Distracted by its developments, he needs to go somewhere where his attempt to formalise his experience may be more realisable. What drives Webber to leave is that "[h]e was feeling, now as never before, the inexorable pressure of time" (378); time becomes burdensome. The sojourn in Brooklyn can thus be seen as a narrative detour since it postpones his arrival at the desired goal. While, as Brooks argues, detours are necessary within the text since they enable textual energies to be generated, these energies must be controlled so as to maintain the plot's initial impetus. The stay in Brooklyn is not conducive to narrative progress; both for Webber's search for narrative and for Wolfe's novel, movement is needed for order to emerge.

Remaining in the city also discourages Webber because it typifies the lack of change within his own life and the lives around him. Earlier in the novel, Webber frequently bemoans repetitive behaviour. He thinks of his teaching as "the old routine of academic chores" (141), his conversations with Esther are "ritual[s]" (17) and when she asks him whether he will always love her, he looks at the "incessant movement, and with the monotony of everlasting repetition" (21) in the street below, and responds, "There's your forever" (21). Given that mobility, as implied by Bauman, comprises movement between different locations, the lack of change in the lives of Brooklyn's poor is indicative of their movement. This lack of change is different from that of the wealthy; mobility, as seen with the Jacks (and earlier with the Buchanans), engenders its own form of stasis since they traverse the same types of places. The poor may be related to Bauman's locally tied, the "vagabonds," who are stranded by a lack of change (121), but in contrast to Steinbeck's

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migrants' state which registers as movement between similarly inadequate spaces, the movement of the homeless and unemployed registers as activity within the same space.

Webber's estimation that he could focus on his work in "the older civilization where life was fixed and certain" (467), takes him to Europe. However, that Europe offers firmer ground on which to secure a coherent end is ironic when he meets the American novelist, Lloyd McHarg – based on Sinclair Lewis (Hovis 36)[22] – who is described as being "at the zenith of his career" (492). Up to now, fame has been a difficult position to define for Webber. His first experiences thereof involve his misguided appreciation of Libya Hill's recognition after the newspaper article misrepresents him; once his novel is released, he is disappointed that it does not garner praise from Libya Hill, despite it being well-received in other parts of the country, and he finds that the recognition he receives from other prominent figures tends to be fleeting. In the case of McHarg, fame does not seem a secure form of "arrival;" it is thus difficult to determine its actualisation. McHarg turns out to be an impatient and unpredictable drunkard, florid and emaciated, who is forever anxious or agitated. His exclamation, "We're going places!" (520), sums up his vague and directionless search for experience. If McHarg has an equivalent in the novel, it is Amy Carlton; in their need to drive or be driven around, Amy and McHarg both call to mind the restless city dwellers in *The Great Gatsby*. It is precisely McHarg's "arrival," his position as someone who has made it, which causes his lack of direction. Like the Buchanans, who also appear to reside at the point towards which others strive, McHarg seems to have nowhere left to go. However, McHarg's breakdown is only a demonstration of the destructiveness of success and mobility on a personal scale, and it would take another journey outward, to Germany, for Webber to fully comprehend the danger of apparent progress on a much larger, national scale.

The recognition that Webber receives in Germany, where he journeys to in order to escape the stress of the release of his new book back home, is particularly prevalent since it feels like a second home. We learn that "[o]f all the countries he had ever seen, that was the one, after America, which he liked the best, and in which he felt most at home, and with whose people he had the most natural, instant, and instinctive sympathy and understanding" (566).[23] Due to the warmth and acceptance that the German people show him, he feels that he experiences fame at last; as the place which realises his dream, it becomes the "geography of [his] heart's desire" (640). What makes Webber appreciate this recognition is that he has a particular admiration for Germany, but like

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[22] In his 1930 Nobel Lecture, entitled "The American Fear of Literature," Lewis identified Wolfe as one of the promising voices in American literature, calling him "a Gargantuan creature with great gusto of life" and proclaiming *Look Homeward, Angel* "worthy to be compared with the best in our literary production" (Lewis, online).

[23] Dieter Meindl contends that Wolfe's attraction to Germany "was rooted in fairytales, an early admiration of Goethe, and his father's Pennsylvania Dutch descent. It kept growing during his European trips, all of which but the first in 1924-25 took him to Germany" (6).

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Libya Hill, Germany has changed since his last visit. Having read with incredulity and sadness about many of the developments relating to Nazi rule, Webber had remained somewhat in denial, dismissing many of the reports as exaggerations. The narrator comments that amidst all the attention, Webber has forgotten about his years in Brooklyn, which indicates that he has lost sight of the social awareness that can, as he realised before the crash, be overlooked due to privilege.

Webber's admiration for Germany is reinforced when he attends the 1936 Olympic Games that are underway in Berlin. However, while he is impressed by the efficiency and order with which the city manages the Games, "the organizing genius of the German people, which has been used to such noble purpose" (571), something about the event troubles him. He experiences a foreboding feeling, and suspects that the Games are no longer conducted in the spirit of sport but that the opportunity to play host was used to showcase Germany's power and progress to the rest of the world. Webber is particularly unsettled when he notices soldiers marching in the streets, many of which are cordoned off to prevent certain members of the public from attending the Games. This segregation is another illustration of the spatial delineation of social groups; it recalls Wolfe's earlier depiction of the architectural separation evident in the Jacks' apartment building.

Webber thinks of those excluded as "the masses of the nation, the poor ones of the earth, the humble ones of life, the workers and the wives, the mothers and the children – and day after day they came and stood and waited. They were there because they did not have money enough to buy the little cardboard squares that would have given them places within the magic ring" (573). However, the recognition he receives from the German public at first prevents Webber from being able to truly recognise these injustices, instantiating his earlier suspicion that privilege hinders one's judgment in recognising grave realities. Webber is, however, confronted with the truth about Germany's political situation on his departing train ride. The chief incident, presented in the section "I Have a Thing to Tell You" (first published as a short story in 1937), is the arrest of "Fuss-and-Fidget," a German Jewish passenger on a train.

Trains and train stations have always been significant, recurrent motifs in Wolfe's work. He had a great admiration for locomotion, in part because of the technological innovation it symbolised, but also because locomotive travel served his artistic aims – his desire for experience – by allowing Wolfe a fleeting glimpse into a multitude of lives. As Richard Walser argues, "[f]or the 'homeless,' peripatetic young Wolfe in his passion to satisfy his hunger for knowledge, for experience, and for coming in contact with all mankind, the train station and the railway cars provided a means whereby to feed his appetite for people, crowds of people" (10). Like Wolfe, Webber recognises the train as being both a means of mobility and a symbol of modern progress. An engineering feat, it represents and intensifies the faith in progress: "The train itself is a miracle of man's handiwork, and everything about it is eloquent of human purpose and direction. […]

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One's own sense of manhood and of mastery is heightened by being on a train" (57). Having such qualities of purpose and direction, the train can be seen to have a chronotopic purpose in the novel. It traces much of the narrative's progressive energies, often being Webber's means of travel, at least with regard to his continental journeys, linking different locations and thus connecting various narrative episodes. In particular, Wolfe's description of the view from the compartment window that presents "[t]he unfolding panorama of the land was itself like a sequence on the scroll of time" (70) echoes Bakhtin's claim that the chronotope makes time visible and concrete in space. As a chronotope that relies on order so as to progress forward, the train offers a way of mapping Webber's quest and his development.

Fuss-and-Fidget is arrested by Nazis at Aachen because he attempted to transport money across the border without declaring it. He allows himself to be led away without betraying his companions who, having run out of currency themselves, agreed to hold some of his money.[24] Webber and the other passengers in his compartment feel ashamed because of their involvement in the incident, as well as their inaction; they watch as Fuss-and-Fidget is led away, their guilt compounded by the fact that he does not betray them. The narrator explains that, despite their earlier prejudice, the remaining travellers in the compartment feel a belated sense of solidarity with Fuss-and-Fidget; they "all felt that they were saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance of the voyage, but to mankind; not to some nameless cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a brother's face" (637). We learn that the German woman in the compartment owns a factory that manufactures mannequins to be displayed in shop windows, which is, Dieter Meindl argues, "apt symbolism with respect to a country engaged in manipulating world opinion and making marionettes of its own people" (13). The Polish-American traveller also present in the compartment is similarly a symbolic figure. Full of hope for a new and more prosperous future, Johnnie Adamowsky is defined by his name as a new American. But as a Pole, he also represents the country soon to be invaded by the Nazis. They represent the direction that Germany – a country with a particular end in mind, a desire to impose order – is headed towards.

The sense of the irrecoverable evoked in the novel's title (and Judge Bland's warning) becomes clear. Webber cannot go home again because the home that exists in his memory no longer exists in reality. He cannot go home again because he himself is no longer the same person and his configuration of home as a place of recognition has changed. Webber's later claim that one can no longer return "home to the escapes of Time and Memory" (644) indicates that he recognises the

[24] The capture of a Jewish passenger aboard a train exiting Germany is also featured in Wolfe's short story "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time." Comparing this story to "I Have a Thing to Tell You," Dieter Meindl argues that "both texts feature a space moving through external space, a configuration suggestive of the outsider status of Jewish travelers whose lives are claimed by the country they failed to leave" (6).

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subjection to time; both he and "home" change. When Webber turns his back on Germany, he effectively turns his back on the aim of ordering his experiences, and his rejection of order registers on a narrative level, for the plot fails to be ordered after the arrest. Thus the novel loses its central impetus after this incident because Webber's social vision expands. Similar to Steinbeck's illustration of migrants' attempts to cross the Californian state border in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the question of spatial access is confronted with the regulation of space and the possession of capital – again, some individuals are prevented from attaining particular ends, from reaching their chosen destinations. Certainly, the attempt at egression is a an image that seems a fitting analogy to what Brooks refers to as the narrative's "discharge" (101), the experience of the narrative desire being fulfilled at the end to produce totalising meaning. But that Webber recognises time as having altered his ambition suggests that time has disrupted order; there can be no successful discharge. In terms of both Webber's quest for order, narrative or otherwise, and his desire for home as a place that confers recognition, home as the sign of attainment, the impossibility of sufficient discharge represents the elusiveness of a coherent end.

The argument against order registers on a narrative level. The arrest is a moment of cessation in the text, in more ways than one. Since Webber is reminded of his aim of rendering an all-embracing account of human experience, the plot fails to be ordered hereafter, for no longer does his quest include the teleological drive for fame. The pitfalls of progress do not bode well for America, which had historically been a place that people (including countless Europeans) escaped to and which always symbolised a new home in which people sought a better life, a country that distinguished itself from others through its associations with freedom and equality. Although abandoning his search for an order, Webber does not reject the American Dream; rather, he calls for a reapplication of it because, as he mentions to Randy shortly after the market crash, America had veered off its intended course:

> Sometimes it seems to me […] that America went off the track somewhere – back around the time of the Civil War, pretty soon afterwards. Instead of going ahead and developing along the line in which the country started out, it got shunted off in another direction – and now we look around and see we've gone places we didn't mean to go. Suddenly we realize that America has turned into something ugly – and vicious – and corroded at the heart of its power with easy wealth and graft and special privilege….And the worst of it is the intellectual dishonesty which all this corruption has bred. People are *afraid* to think straight – *afraid* to face themselves – *afraid* to look at things and see them as they are. We've become like a nation of advertising men, all hiding behind such phrases like 'prosperity' and 'rugged individualism' and 'the American way.' And the real things like freedom, and equal opportunity, and the integrity and worth of the individual – things that have belonged to the American dream since the beginning – they have become words, too. The substance has gone out of them – they're not real any more. (360, original emphases)

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Webber is suggesting that America has been progressing in the wrong direction and has become something which its founders had not intended it to be. The result is that Americans have overlooked fundamental principles upon which the Dream was initially established. Webber's own misdirected ambition for fame instead of truth is but a symptom of a greater national one. Moreover, his identification of the Civil War as the event that obscured the nation's original plot is significant. Since the country was divided given the Confederacy's attempt at secession, the Civil War for Webber marks a moment when the nation lost its shared aims.[25] By asserting that a particular intention has been obscured, Webber is suggesting that the American Dream is a principle that ought to be *enacted*, a type of motivating force that will see it in a constant state of "becoming" (467).

As with the novel's opening, Webber returns from Europe to America with a renewed sense of purpose. He has found a different intention as a result of his new social consciousness – "the definite sense of new direction" (644). His new mission is expressed in the final section of the novel, "The Wind is Rising, and the Rivers Flow," which takes the form of a letter to his editor Foxhall Edwards, in which Webber gives an account of his life and his maturation as an artist. He relates his experiences with other writers who, like him, commenced their careers with the goal of veracious work in mind but who lost their artistic integrity after being sidetracked by material success. He relates that one such writer, Hunt Conroy – based on F. Scott Fitzgerald (Hovis 32) – wanted him to join their elite group in Europe but he rejects them for being uninvolved with the world around them. Such writers' exilic ways of life – like that of Lloyd McHarg – is akin to the withdrawal of the wealthy in the wake of the fire and the market crash it symbolised. "This lack of engagement with life," explains Dawson, "prevents one from understanding the common nature of experience and from perceiving the agents that thwart individual potential" (60). The resultant denial of the truth, for Webber, seems an attempt to continue to guard an established order that denies more widespread opportunities for mobility. In his letter, Webber also announces his split from Foxhall, who we learn "had been born with everything" (443) and yet "has no hope that men will change, that life will ever get much better" (451). It is this pessimism (also experienced among Esther's guests), most of all, that Webber feels is most destructive of the realisation of the American

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[25] Biographer David Herbert Donald argues that

> Wolfe's fundamental concern was less with political and economic conditions than with the spirit of America. To him the United States had originally been a chosen land, the country that promised 'high and glorious fulfil[l]ment' to all its citizens. But this promise had been broken. A 'dark wound' had been inflicted on the United States through 'betrayal – vicious, cowardly betrayal – self-betrayal of ourselves.' No longer was the country a single society. (437)

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Dream. Webber's explanation to Foxhall of the artist's duty reflects his view of the Dream as a force rather than a destination:

> [I]nstead of being in union with life, [the artist] was in perpetual conflict with it. Instead of belonging to the world he lived in, he was constantly in a state of flight from it. The world itself was like a beast of prey, and the artist, like some wounded faun, was forever trying to escape from it. (660)

Webber recognises that the artist is someone who never settles, who always has to act in response to what he encounters in the world around him. This tendency to forever defer desire is what makes Webber continually leave one place for another and which suggests that Wolfe's novel cannot end with any sense of closure or finality. It is also this tendency that Webber recognises as being America's redeeming quality. Having initially abandoned America in favour of the old, established history of Europe, it is now America's youth that Webber takes pride. Webber does not deny that conditions are bad, but believes that, in contrast to Europe, America can still be salvaged: "I believe we are lost here in America," he writes, "but I believe we will be found" (678). It is the Depression that has placed the country in an ongoing state of "becoming" (467), but it is precisely this state of becoming that Webber feels most virtuous about American society. For him, America does not represent order, but rather opportunity, albeit opportunity commensurate with the continual deferral of the end. For Webber's mission and Wolfe's narrative, there can be no closure; there can be no final, authoritative order.

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CONCLUSION

The Narrative End:
The Dream Disenchanted and the Collapse of Plot

In this thesis, I took as my point of departure the observation by Alexis de Tocqueville that Americans are characterised by restlessness born of the desire to establish themselves elsewhere, a tendency that results in ongoing departures. Although Tocqueville's view is that of an outsider, the experience of moving in order to settle happily elsewhere has been embraced and utilised by many American writers throughout the nineteenth century. The recurrence of the movement motif is due, in part, to America's historical development, commencing with the migration of Europeans who arrived in the New World in search of a home. Writers throughout the nation's history have drawn on these earlier journey experiences, the result of which has been the formation of an American mythology, various interrelated myths that have attempted to posit a national character.

One of the fundamental experiences that had contributed to a conception of American identity has been westward movement across the frontier, which has helped to establish the view of the American West as a locus of new beginnings that held the promise of social mobility. Social mobility was conceived of as being a particularly realisable project within the American context, given the view that the nation was ostensibly free of social structures such as class. One of the ways in which the American myth may be posited – and which is the essence of American mobility – is the American Dream. The national ethos that posits the right and ability to better oneself socially, the Dream is based on the view of that, in America, one's success of advancing socially would not be hampered by one's past, but rather be the result of one's ability or efforts. The novels focused on in this thesis depict various characters' attempts at attaining the American Dream. In so doing, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Thomas Wolfe's *You Can't Go Home Again* each takes geographical relocation as a condition for social progression.

In order to analyse the characters' attempts at social mobility, I took the relation between movement and place as being relatable to Peter Brooks's conception of narrative dynamic. According to Brooks, the plot is the narrative's line of intent, its "plan," which is tasked with shaping narrative. Brooks proposes a view of narratives as serial formations set in motion by the presence of a teleological force, narrative desire, present both within the text and the reader. The satisfaction of this desire relies on the plotting process as a dynamic operation that works through desire by developing meanings through temporal progression. Narratives seek totalisation, complete resolution at the narrative end, although this should be achieved only through alternating phases of suspense and partial resolution. Thus, in seeking totalising meaning, narratives need to work

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through a series of resistances, which suggests, then, that narratives essentially take the form of the romantic quest, as described by Northrop Frye; resistances are worked through in an attempt to reach the resolution, or *anagnorisis*.

Brooks's concept suggests a wedding of form and meaning, one which unravels in the modernist period due to a loss of faith in plots as authoritative structures. Brooks puts forth this point in a discussion of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which, as a framed narrative, engenders continual deferral of signification, and thereby indicates the divorce of what was previously a reciprocal relationship between form and content. With the elusiveness of resolved ends in the modernist period in mind, I aimed to interpret the characters' attempts at attaining the American Dream. In order to read their social mobility in relation to their movement through space, I incorporated Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope" alongside the theory of narrative dynamic. Plot-generating and responsible for the representation of narrative events, the chronotope enables temporal progression to be measured spatially, and served as the point of intersection between mobility and narrative dynamic, offering a way of looking at particular moments in the texts and registering the state of affairs relative to initiatory desire. It enabled a discussion of the extent to which the questing characters were progressing in time by engaging a discussion of the corresponding places they find themselves in at particular moments, to recognise whether or not they find themselves to have moved socially at all. The implication was that the alternation between suspense and resolution in the narrative would correspond to that between movement and rest or settlement.

The characters' movement was considered in relation to the developments prevalent in the interwar period during which the novels appeared. Among these are the reported closing of the frontier, new modes of transport, as well as increased urbanisation and globalisation. According to Zygmunt Bauman, globalisation impacts significantly upon the movement of people in that it signifies a great many people being on the move quite extensively, but it also registers varying degrees of mobility. Given that the novels appeared during the interwar period, my study took account of the coincidence of the new conditions influencing mobility with the Great Depression (including the years preceding it and its aftermath), as well as with the emergence of literary modernism – the implication being that these developments may impact on the narrative dynamic. In short, I aimed to demonstrate the novels' depictions of mobility in relation to narrative by taking the American Dream as the narrative's mobilising force, the intent that propels and shapes narrative dynamic. F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck and Thomas Wolfe were chosen for their familiarity with traditional teleological narratives, their interest in the American experience of their time – which included the issue of social mobility – and their individual experiences of modern travel. Writers with different styles and aims, they enabled a consideration of how inherited patterns of

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redemptive movement may be subjected to various contextualising gestures, among these to historical developments and modernist irony.

In my discussions of these novels, what has emerged is the manner in which the plotting process as an ordering force that relies on temporal progression is thwarted; history, nature, political developments – in short, reality – have emerged as forces that counter and ultimately override redemptive movement. The course between the narrative beginning and end presents resistances that turn out to not have been sufficiently worked through – none of the questers reaches a sustained position of social improvement despite relocation and, in some cases, significant geographical movement, because narrative desire either dissipates or remains unfulfilled. We therefore find, at the narrative end, a lack of development of the initial line of intent, in that the beginnings and endings do not cohere.

In the case of *The Great Gatsby*, this lack of coherence is a result of a persistent postponement of resolution. When Nick equates Gatsby's quest to that of the Dutch sailors, he is essentially recognising Gatsby as someone who never properly settles. For much of the novel, Gatsby exists in a state of suspension akin to that of the sailors upon spotting the coast. He believes in acquiring an optimal outcome, and thus he confers extreme value to the objects of his desire; when he spots Dan Cody's yacht, for instance, "[it] represented *all* the beauty and glamour in the world" (106, emphasis added). What works against such ambition is that when these desires are not realised in the present, the result is the deferral of the Dream. What Fitzgerald wrote of Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* is, to some extent, applicable to Gatsby: "It was the becoming he dreamed of, never the being" (20). Gatsby's focus is always that which could be in the future, as indicated when he asks Nick, "What was the use of doing great things if I could have a better time telling [Daisy] what I was *going to do*?" (157, emphasis added). By continually deferring, by remaining in suspense, he avoids moments that may serve as partial recognitions, for within that "dilatory space," the space of suspense, desire needs to be worked through and ordered so that it may reach a satisfactory end, as Fitzgerald suggests with Daisy's choice to move on, to finally settle, while Gatsby is at war:

> And all the time something within her was crying for a decision. She wanted her life shaped now, immediately – and the decision must be made by some force – of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality – that was close at hand.
>
> That force took shape in the middle of spring with the arrival of Tom Buchanan. (159)

It is, however, precisely because Gatsby cannot be the one to bring resolution to Daisy's life that he continually defers; the Dream, as Nick notes at the end of the novel, is already behind him. That the

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period between the arrival of the Dutch sailors to Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy has witnessed the emergence of a wealthy leisure class explains Gatsby's desire to redeem time, to go back to the moment when Daisy believed him to be of her social standing. In trying to fix a moment that is commensurate with the past indicates that Gatsby's efforts are superseded by historical flux. Mobility has become a contingent matter, as Nick discovers with his meeting of Meyer Wolfsheim; one may or may not reach the desired result. The ends that may resolve the narrative conflict are not limited to a paradigmatic range. Moreover, the principal instances that Nick relates as pivotal moments in Gatsby's quest – his initial meetings with Cody and Wolfsheim – are both chance encounters, as is the one with Daisy: "he knew that he was in Daisy's house by a colossal accident" (156). Chance disrupts the plot as a signifying chain in which we can anticipate the interconnectedness of events because narrative dynamic exists in an arbitrary relation to temporal progression.

The inability of the quest to reach a satisfactory end is indicative of the plot's failure to be progressive, to develop its plan or enact its design through time. According to Brooks, incidents in the narrative middle should not be undone or jeopardised by the end; instead they should be shown to have been useful and contributory to the narrative's final discharge since they are read as promises, predictive of ultimate resolution, so that the beginning and the end may cohere. As if seeking to uncover remnants of frontier America, Nick's attempt to bring the past in line with the present results, as he says, in a distorted view of the East. Thus Gatsby's fault is to see in a fleeting moment of wonder unending possibilities even though "he knew that he had lost that part of it, the freshest and the best, forever" (161). Nick's vision of the eastern coast as it might have seemed to Dutch sailors recognises what has become of the West. The West has been subjected to various developments associated with globalisation.

Since globalisation results in mobility being restrictive for some, it impacts on the paradigmatic nodes that redemptive movement depends on to register narrative progression. The influence of such subjective mobility on narrative development is evidenced by the difference in movement between landowners and tenant farmers in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. In the tenants' movement from one location to the next, Steinbeck presents a relatively changeless interface between space and time as the Joads move along Route 66. The sequential linearity of the narrative is challenged by the inaccessibility of places that would satisfy desire and bring the narrative to a resolved end. The tenants' movement from Oklahoma to California merely gives the narrative the appearance of change, since they do not reach a better position from the one they leave in Oklahoma. Since landowners, representative of the globally mobile, determine the tenants' movement, as well as their access to camps, the departures and arrivals that construct tenants'

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quests, they control their entry into locations at which their desires may be fulfilled. The denial of access thus prevents the plot from meeting its structural demands.

In expressing the Joads' expectations of arriving in California, Steinbeck employs the rhetoric that has, for centuries, drawn immigrants to America and positioned California as the nation's Promised Land. Since the Joads repeat the earlier migration of settlers to California, the story echoes what Janis P. Stout identifies as the traditional American home-founding journey. Describing this genre and its common characteristics, Stout writes that "[g]enerally, […], when we read a novel of the journey to found a home, we expect that after due tribulations the special place will be found and marriages, births, and new social order will ensue. That expectation is usually rewarded" (45). She claims that

> [a] recurrent incident conveying the qualities of hope and future-centeredness in the home-seeking journey is pregnancy and the first birth in the settlement. Crystallizing the settlers' aspirations for the future, the first birth is an occasion for celebration, even inspiration. In contrast, the death of a new-born infant or other child along the way epitomizes the adversities to be endured by the settlers if they are to 'create a new life over this Endless Wilderness, and transform it into a habitable land for human beings.'[26] (42-3)

Steinbeck clearly subjects these mythic gestures to irony. His novel ends with no new home, no united family, no marriage and, tragically, Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn baby. The Joads indeed reach a state that is a place of agricultural abundance, as they imagined, but even so, it is not a locus of opportunity. What Steinbeck accomplishes with this novel is, in part, to expose the naivety of tenants to believe in such myths – his characteristic confrontation between reality and imagination. One thinks, for instance, of Pa's optimistic words when they arrive in the desert, "Wait till we get to California. You'll see nice country then," which is followed by Tom's dismissive retort, "Jesus Christ, Pa! This here *is* California" (204, original emphasis). This type of anticipation is repeatedly thwarted. The hopefulness that the realisation of the Dream is yet to come is, of course, precisely that which pushed back the frontier. Even near the end of the novel, when their circumstances are dire, the remaining Joads are hopeful: "Maybe – well, maybe nex' year we can get a place" (423), Ma suggests. But, as the narrator claims, "all of them were caught in something larger than themselves" (31), and what they are caught up in is an ongoing process with no destination. Jody's grandfather expresses this point more explicitly in *The Red Pony*:

> It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. […] It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. […]

[26] Stout is quoting from O. E. Rolvaag, *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1927) 295.

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> When we saw the mountains at last, we cried – all of us. But it wasn't getting here that mattered – it was movement and westering. (129)

The continuous deferral of the end is a result of historical progression overriding individual progressive efforts, thus delimiting individual agency. Time, instead of being ordered by plot, affects the characters' drive and thus disrupts the plot; the more time they spend on the road, the more aware some of the Joads become of the unlikelihood of their arrival, and grow increasingly aware of alternative projects. As the family unit disintegrates and as the prospect of re-establishing themselves successfully becomes less probable, other desires become more pronounced, some of which are not governed by a particular end. With the aim of incorporating contemporary concerns, Steinbeck has Jim Casy and Tom reject the aim of finding a new home in favour of the mobilisation of labourers – a mission that engenders more immediate action, as opposed to questing after a desired outcome. This is, fundamentally, a rejection by Steinbeck of the end as a dominant part of the narrative.

As Brooks has noted about traditional narratives, the end has structuring force. As the point that confers totalising meaning, the end, when deferred, results in a lack of closure. Despite necessary resistances, there needs to be a perceptible, coherent relation throughout the narrative – the result of desire taking shape in anticipation of final predication, which Brooks compares to the moment of death. What we find is that, in the case of Tom Joad, for example, people are subject to time; thus characters may abandon their quests. But people alone are not subjected to time; places are too, and this is partly what problematises the questers' search for a place at which the Dream may be actualised. What Fitzgerald and Steinbeck make clear in their novels is that the West is no longer the same place. "Tom Wolfe was right," Steinbeck conceded in *Travels with Charley*; "You can't go home again because home has ceased to exist except in the mothballs of memory" (206). He makes the same pronouncement as Nick in his estimation that the Midwest is no longer the same home as it was during his childhood.

In one of the instances in which Nick claims that the West is no longer the same, he evokes a childhood memory of returning to the Midwest by train. It is essentially a recollection that proclaims that there was a time when one could return and find one's world intact. But then Nick also mentions two other returns: the novel opens with an acknowledgement of his return from the war and it ends with his return to the Midwest. In both instances, Nick is disillusioned. When he returned from the war, he desired the Midwest to be "the warm centre of the world" (7), while upon his return from the East, he "wanted the world to be in uniform and at a moral attention forever" (6). In the romantic quest, of course, the return signifies the moment of *anagnorisis*. In Nick's case,

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it brings no such resolution since his move back west is a retreat; it happens as a type of defeat – he gives up on pursuing the Dream.

The recognition of home as a place toward which one cannot return is central to Wolfe's novel, as the title indicates. It highlights the impossibility of securely projecting one's desires. While redemptive movement is tasked with overcoming an otherwise disordered narrative, to reach a *topos* at which time may be fixed, it fails to do so. In moving towards the moment of resolution, the moment that would be the proper death, as Brooks suggests, time always threatens to disrupt the plot's progression (104). Webber's suggestion that the artist, whose duty it is to order experience into fiction, is fated to continual departures in the hope of finding a coherent order, a resolved end, is representative of the way in which modernist narratives operate. He seeks closure, the knowledge of having produced some attainment before death, but this is precisely what reality resists. The complexity of Webber's desire – that it concerns the imposition of an order but also seeks to reflect reality – causes him to continually abandon one location for another.

Wolfe's and Webber's approach to the creation of fiction raises the question of the extent to which either author's experiences could be disciplined by plot. It was a problem Wolfe in fact encountered with the publication of his first book, as he explained in *The Story of the Novel*, which produced the same response in Asheville as Webber's *Home to Our Mountains* did in Libya Hill:

> For the first time I was forced to consider squarely this problem: where does the material of an artist come from? What are the proper uses of that material, and how far must his freedom in the use of that material be controlled by his responsibility as a member of society? For although my book was not true to fact, it was true to the general experience of the town I came from and I hope, of course, to the general experience of all men living. (572)

Wolfe's novel makes overt many of the points raised in the discussions of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Grapes of Wrath*; it raises many of the questions that this thesis does – what happens to narrative operation when one attempts to incorporate reality, when one subjects redemptive movement to complex desires, to historical flux, to contemporary social and political developments. Wolfe's novel highlights the impossibility of imposing order on a protean world. Like Fitzgerald's and Steinbeck's novels, Wolfe's ends without the quest being resolved, but what sets his apart from theirs is that his celebrates the American tendency to defer desire.

The American Dream seems a favourable pursuit for the analysis of narratives that rely on patterns of redemptive movement, precisely because it is a dream, an intent that is yet to be realised. But in their attempts to take into account contemporary issues that both enable and hinder mobility, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck and Wolfe adopted the American Dream as an endlessly deferred goal. The lack of coherence between the narrative start and its end suggests that the American experience is

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predictive of unresolved endings. These modernist writers have made use of myths, primarily but not exclusively, relating to America's history, its identity, its conceptions of opportunity, but have shown that many of the conditions upon which these myths are based no longer prevail. Like Tocqueville, they have identified the irony of the continual search for the fulfilment of desire in the American context: the belief that there is always a place to which to quest or flee, which has resulted in the ongoing deferral of desire and ultimately non-finality. The desired ends remain out of reach at the close of each novel since the organisational demands of plot are resisted, thereby preventing final, totalising meaning and rendering the American Dream forever elusive.

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