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Queering the Canon: a Queer Reading of *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Tornando o cânone queer: uma leitura queer de *O Grande Gatsby*, de F. Scott Fitzgerald

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Abstract: The present article aims to undertake a queer reading (Sedgwick, 2002) of the novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald based on queer theory. The main objective consists of verifying the apparent queerness of the protagonist considering the choice of words in the novel, the time it takes place (1920s) and his relationship with other characters. A textual analysis has been carried out taking into consideration the queer elements of the novel, such as the gay and lesbian signs that corroborate with the queer subtext that appears as a result of Nick Carraway's gay sensibility within the narrative (Tyson, 2015). In this sense, excerpts that readers might interpret as queer-coded have been analysed. The results show that it is possible to identify not only the queer subtext of the novel but also why queer readers might relate to it.

Keywords: queer theory, textual analysis, queer reading, F. Scott Fitzgerald, American literature

Resumo: O presente artigo visa realizar uma leitura *queer* (Sedgwick, 2002) do romance *O Grande Gatsby*, de F. Scott Fitzgerald, baseada na teoria *queer*. O principal objetivo consiste em verificar a aparente *queerness* da personagem principal, considerando a escolha de palavras no romance, o período em que o livro se passa (década de 1920) e a forma como o protagonista se relaciona com outras pessoas no livro. Uma análise textual foi executada levando em consideração os elementos *queer* do romance, como os sinais gays e lésbicos que corroboram com o subtexto *queer*, os quais aparecem como um resultado da sensibilidade gay de Nick Carraway na narrativa (Tyson, 2015). Dessa forma, trechos que leitores podem interpretar como *queer* foram analisados. Os resultados mostram que é possível a identificação não só do subtexto *queer* do romance, como também da razão pela qual leitores *queer* podem associar-se a ele.

Palavras-chave: teoria queer, análise textual, leitura queer, F. Scott Fitzgerald, literatura americana

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1. Introduction

Literature usually follows patterns established by society. Because of that, still today, most canonical literature books largely reinforce cisgender, white, and heteronormative identities (Hazra, 2021). In this sense, socially marginalised people feel excluded and search for alternative ways of representation: either it is by creating their own works of literature or by reappropriating the already existing media into something of their own. For issues regarding gender and sexuality, queer theory is an area born from lesbian and gay studies that was created in the early 1990s as a field to discuss the social and cultural implications of heteronormativity in society and how it ends up marginalising any difference from its norms (Jagose, 1997). Queer literary critics, in turn, have been using queer theory to study and challenge the prejudice found in literature against the LGBTQIA+ community and bring awareness about queer literature and its authors.

Eve Sedgwick (2002), one the most critical figures in queer theory, introduced the term "Queer Reading". According to this concept, to perform a queer reading of a text means to distance oneself from the heteronormative perspective. By recognizing elements in a literary text that could be interpreted as queer, readers may subvert the canon and discover a new form of interpreting a story connecting it to their own experiences. Thus, no text would be exclusively straight or queer: if textual cues exist and can support a possible queer reading, readers will possibly find and perform it. Analysing a text through the queer gaze then would be a form of cultural criticism (Belsey, 2014) — an understanding of culture in the texts — as well as a response to the struggle of lack of diversity in media and a way of resisting, existing and fighting against the prejudice related to the LGBTQIA+ community.

This article's main objective, therefore, is to perform a queer reading of the American novel *The Great Gatsby* originally published in 1925 by Scott F. Fitzgerald[†]. The research is based on texts related to queer theory, including the paranoid and reparative reading concept by Sedgwick (2002). Besides, it seeks to verify how Fitzgerald's depiction of the narration used to build the relationship between Nick and Gatsby can be perceived as homosocial and homoerotic.

The Great Gatsby appears when Fitzgerald used most of his early life experiences and opinions about love and money (Berman, 2002) as inspiration for writing. From these sources, readers get to know the majestic, highly descriptive New York and its fictional villages East and West Egg through the eyes of Nick Carraway. Throughout the novel, he is a spectator of the routine and drama of the rich people of New York, especially once he is captivated by the popular yet mysterious figure of Jay Gatsby — his neighbour. Soon, Nick is drawn to an old love spectacle involving Gatsby and Nick's cousin: Daisy

[†] It was used for this analysis an edition published in 2003 by Amazon Classics (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Buchanan. Amidst his work, joining extravagant social gatherings and helping Gatsby regain Daisy, readers get to know more about other characters from the book (such as Jordan Baker, Nick's love interest). In addition, Gatsby's personality is unveiled before Nick and the readers, and their friendship becomes one of the main issues of the novel. By the end, once the dramatic, chaotic affair of Gatsby and Daisy becomes known, she is faced with the decision of joining Gatsby or remaining with her husband: she chooses the latter. After a series of unfortunate events for Gatsby, he is murdered in the pool of his own mansion; a victim of revenge for a crime he did not commit. The last chapter of the novel reveals that despite Jay Gatsby being popular in life, only Nick and his father Henry C. Gatz attended his funeral, showing that after all, Nick was the only one to ever care about him.

The research method of the article according to Belsey (2013) is textual analysis, in which the text is viewed as the central source, setting the questions that invite readers to possible interpretations. The understanding of a text, in this sense, is seen as never final since it is formed by language. Language, in turn, is plural and can only become meaningful once other people understand it using their relations with the world and their perception of culture. Thus, the analysis of the excerpts taken from the novel focus primarily on the possible implications of queer elements and moments (Doty, 1992 apud Sullivan, 2007) inferred by the language used by Fitzgerald through his narrator Nick Carraway while describing the events, actions and relationships built with other characters in the novel. Hence, the intention of this article is not to modify the canon, but to offer a new perspective based on a literary analysis from a queer reading point of view. Therefore, focusing on these aspects — as well as the analysis of other theorists — makes a queer reading of this classic of American literature a possible form of textual analysis.

2.1 Reading Queerly: Queer Theory and the "Paranoid and Reparative Readings"

Queer theory, as a field of study, was founded in the 90s and studies gender and sexual practices that defy the notion of heteronormativity. It includes diverse identities in every aspect of life — historical, social, political, racial, religious, economical, etc — and seeks to debate possible definitions of the terms "gay", "trans", or "queer" and how they define the thoughts and experiences of humans as individuals and as a society. In a world where being straight and cisgender is the norm, everything that steps out of this pattern becomes weird, therefore, queer. These studies explain how heteronormativity works as an enclosed, suppressing space, labelling as "wrong" everything that comes out of "the norm". Within Literary Studies, queer theorists may focus on the different interpretations of a text, studying queer characters, exploring the sexuality of authors once seen exclusively as straight, and — as is the main focus of this article — performing readings of texts previously seen as heteronormative from a queer point of view.

Thus, queer theory worries about researching how texts and media construct the understanding of gender, sexuality and subjectivity (Sullivan, 2007). Queer readings — or queering —, in turn, work with what can and cannot be seen in the surface and depth of a literary text, what can be read through subtexts. Some literary texts, although primarily heteronormative, may contain elements that, when read by a specific community, can be re-interpreted and change how a story is understood.

Sedgwick (2002) calls this search for "secrets" within the subtext of a story "paranoid reading": it is assumed that a text is hiding something, that there is something amiss and not said by the characters and the duty of the audience as queer readers is to discover the hidden truth. Now, it is possible to see a similarity between Sedgwick's (2002) and Barthes' (1977) works: the focus given on the research done about the text — what other critics have to say —, the supposition or the "reading too much" into one single aspect of the literary text means to be paranoid or to limit your perspectives as a reader, and by consequence, the text as well. Here, both theorists believe that for the reader to understand something, this something needs to be implied in the text in the first place. Reading and interpreting have nothing to do with what the text can say to the reader specifically, but with what exists in it and what a reader, as a singular entity — or community — with unique cultural experiences can take from it.

Sedgwick (2002) also introduces the antithesis of paranoid reading: reparative reading. In this, a text would not be read to discover something, but it would be seen as a form of getting joy and nourishment to navigate a world full of prejudice. To answer questions is not what is important, but what a piece of text meant to you as a queer reader, how and why. Reparative readers are realistic and allow themselves to be surprised by the narrative, not reading a text specifically to pursue queer elements; texts in which a reparative reading is possible are not restrictive of characters' sexuality and are often ambiguous. Both strategies are possible and not necessarily good and/or bad, as Sedgwick (2002, p. 150-151) states: "What we can best learn from such practices are, perhaps, the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture — whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them".

Readers can find "a resource for survival" (Stockton, 2023, p. 45) in works of literature recognising that not everything is inherently straight or queer, but what creates different interpretations of it is their experiences and perception of things. Since meaning is given according to social conventions, queer readers do not read a text like cisgender, straight readers do. Because the queer community is big — encompassing different genders, races and sexualities — even though they all step out of the heteronormative pattern, their reading will not be the same as well. To this, Alexander Doty (1992, p. 2 *apud* Sullivan, 2007, p. 190) argues that queerness is "a mass culture reception practice that is shared by all sorts of people in varying degrees of consistency and intensity".

In *The Great Gatsby* the textual analysis presented in this paper takes into consideration, then, both concepts of paranoid and reparative reading. Likewise, it works with concepts used by other queer theorists, such as "queer moments". As explained by Doty (1992 *apud* Sullivan, 2007), a queer moment happens when readers find within the text elements that they recognize as strange, that destabilise a heteronormative logic. In addition to this, since it is impossible not to use one's background when interpreting cultural texts (as it was argued throughout this section), even if a text is approached with no queer thoughts in mind, when readers encounter elements in it that evoke a queer moment, by consequence a queer reading will start involuntarily by inferences and connecting the reader's previous knowledge with what is presented in the text. In other words, queer elements can also be named "gay signs" as explained by Tyson (2015, p. 325). For her, there are two types: the first one relates more to the stereotypes associated with queer people by the heteronormative community, stereotypes that are not always true when recognising a queer person (for example, that every gay man is flamboyant, or every lesbian woman has short hair), whereas the second one is coded signs created by the queer community itself — like the usage of specific slangs or accessories inside the community[‡].

Other important terms presented by Tyson (2015) — all derived from Sedgwick's own ideas (1985) — are the ones of "homosocial bonding" and "transgressive sexuality": the former describes a strong emotional relationship between same-sex characters that can — or cannot — be interpreted as homoerotic; it could also be only a strong friendship between two men, for instance. In literature, homosocial bonding puts an emotional tie in the centre of the narrative, showing how it can be created and affected by a homophobic and heterosexist civilization. Besides, characters that share this bonding can sometimes be viewed as same-sex doubles: they mirror each other in the sense of looking alike, acting similarly or having convergent experiences. "Transgressive sexuality", in turn, is used to describe the focus of a text on what is considered "natural" and "unnatural" sexual behaviour according to social rules. This focus does not only bring to light questions about queerness, but also what could be seen as transgressive inside heteronormativity (e.g. extramarital sex). When studying how a text deals with sexual experimentation, with boundaries, the existence of multiple partners and the feeling of shame or living a double life due to one's sexual desire, the interpretation of a queer subtext is possible.

Hence, this article consists of queering the American modernist novel *The Great Gatsby*. Here, it is believed that after reading the novel through the queer gaze and

[‡] The queer Brazilian dialect "Pajubá" is an example of queer sign recurrent in the Brazilian queer community, specially amongst trans women and gay men. The usage of "coconut rings" is also considered a lesbian sign amongst the sapphic Brazilian community. These sorts of cultural characteristics are only recognised inside the community itself and are meant to be hidden from the straight community.

analysing the nuances of the language used, gay signs could be found to assist the interpretation of queer moments within the novel. Besides, the existence of queer moments supports the idea of the possible implications of Nick Carraway's sexuality and how it helped to construct his relationship with other characters such as Jay Gatsby, Mr. McKee and Jordan Baker. Consequently, a queer reading of *The Great Gatsby* becomes acceptable and expected.

3. Nick Carraway: a Queer Character?

In the very first chapter of the novel, Nick Carraway establishes what readers must think of him: "I'm inclined to reserve all judgments" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 1). As the story continues, Nick affirms himself as "[...] one of the few honest people that I have ever known" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 58). In fact, most of his characterisation confirms this. Nick seems to be a mere spectator of the events unfolding before him, a reliable person whom other characters run to confide secrets or ask for help — as Gatsby does when asking him to help him talk and start an affair with Daisy. At first glance, Nick is the least interesting part of the novel: nothing ever happens to him, and nothing affects him as much as other characters. In short, he is there to tell people about the drama starring the rich folk of West and East Egg in New York.

Since most things in the novel do not involve Nick directly, maybe readers get used to seeing him just as a narrator and an honest, trustworthy one as well, for Nick never does or says anything that causes people to make a bad judgement of his personality. However, this position as the reliable narrator may crumble after a few considerations, leading to a new interpretation. The first hint of it is the statement itself: Nick knows a lot about everything; he describes things with an, oftentimes, impartial look. Yet, people do not know about him. Nick is intrinsically inserted inside the narrative, knowing everyone's secrets, yet nobody knows any of his. By the end of the novel, we could say that readers did not connect with Nick the same way they might have with Gatsby, Daisy, or even Jordan. Why? Because Nick does not allow them to do it. In the novel, Nick plays not only the part of the narrator but also a character. That means he is what is called an *I, as a witness* narrator (Friedman, 1967); he describes scenes without knowing exactly what is going on inside other characters' minds and can make inferences and suppositions about what is happening, but we will never know the entire truth, for he is also a participant in the events. Because of that, Nick narrates according to his own conventions, desires and understanding of the world.

He does not share much about himself and when he does, it is always a small detail that readers might not pay a lot of attention to. He talks about how Gatsby is mysterious, but he makes a lot of effort to not let readers — or anyone else in the novel — connect with him, being mysterious and evasive. Keith Fraser (1979, p. 68) in his reading of *The*

Great Gatsby, affirms: “It is not unreasonable to suppose that Nick’s readiness to declare his cardinal virtue to be honesty is deliberately intended to mislead us”. This can be seen as the first gay sign of the novel if we consider the time it was written and the period it displayed: still today, many gay men are used to hiding who they truly are by not allowing people to know much about them. Besides, at the beginning of the 20th century, being gay was illegal in the U.S.A., which led the queer community to live secret lives, hiding and trying to blend with the heteronormative society[§].

After it is identified in Nick a pattern to evade a closer understanding of his inner self, it gets easier to recognise those moments and reflect upon them. Of course, hiding things is not enough proof that he is queer; it is *what* he hides and *how* he does it (Herman, 2017). For most queer people, it is impossible to not let their desires and the divergence from heterosexuality be completely concealed. Moreover, Nick, although trying very hard, lets glimpses of his queerness escape through his language while describing events, characters, and his relationship with them while reflecting on them as well.

The Great Gatsby seems to be fairly heterosexual with the main plot centred around Jay Gatsby’s love for Daisy Buchanan and their extramarital affair — as well as the affair between Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson: already signs of transgressive sexuality (Tyson, 2015). However, one of the novel’s main ideas is to show that things are not always what they seem to be. After it is established that Nick does not let the reader know him completely, the second gay sign appears every time he describes the characters of the novel: there is a clear distinction in the adjectives and descriptions used to illustrate male and female characters.

Whereas the cited men receive highly detailed descriptions, the women receive only a few words about their physique and/or personality. Nick does not seem to give women a closer look; he does not bother to linger more than he has to. In chapter one, when he meets Tom Buchanan for the first time, two entire paragraphs are separated to introduce the man. He makes sure that the reader understands that Tom is a strong, arrogant man, that his body holds an “enormous power” and “It was a body capable of enormous leverage — a cruel body” (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 7). Tom Buchanan is the representation of old money, a conservative, violent and oftentimes racist man, and during the novel, although despising him, Nick continues to paint Tom as dominant and powerful.

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§ In the 1920s the U.S. had the Sodomy Laws that, although not exclusively criminalising homosexuality, often targeted sexual relationships between people of the same sex. The time of imprisonment for sodomy charges at the period was up to twenty years. In New York — where the novel is placed — the decriminalisation of same-sex sexual intercourse only happened in 1980.

The same level of descriptiveness is not given to Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress. When Tom introduces the two of them, Nick first notices that she is slightly overweight. Although he recognises some sensuality in the woman, he says her face "contained no facet or gleam of beauty" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 25). Another odd contrast in chapter two, however, is the description of Mr. and Mrs. McKee, a couple of friends, together with Tom and Myrtle. When the latter takes Nick to their apartment in the West Hundreds, Myrtle invites the couple so all of them can drink and have a party. Nick describes Mr. McKee as "a pale, feminine man" who was "in the artistic game" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 29) and had just shaved — a detail cunningly noticed by Nick because the man had a spot of lather on his cheekbones — and he says that he is very respectful towards everybody. Mrs. McKee, on the other hand, is just "shrill, languid, handsome, and horrible" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 30).

Generally, besides his more detailed description, Nick also views men in a much more positive light — or at least their physical features. The women, in turn, are poorly described and have always something bad said about their faces, bodies or personalities. It is interesting and curious to read Nick calling Mrs. McKee "horrible" having known her for only a few minutes especially after he started the novel saying that he refrained from being judgmental. This can only mean two things: either he lied to the reader — which implies he is not an honest narrator — or he found Mrs. McKee was horrible for who she was and/or whom she had. Also, it is important to point out that Nick describing women in a derogatory manner relates to how he views the opposite gender. Although that can be read as a gay sign, it can also be viewed as a strong trace of misogyny. Being gay does not exclude the possibility of one being sexist, thus, Nick's description might as well be more related here to prejudiced notions regarding gender than sexuality itself.

Nonetheless, both possibilities can be probably seen as a gay sign and lead to the creation of a queer reading. It is also in chapter two that what could be seen as a major queer moment of the novel appears involving Nick and Mr. McKee. After an afternoon of partying and drinking, McKee falls asleep in a chair and Nick sees this as an opportunity to approach him and use a handkerchief to clean "the remains of the spot of dried lather that had worried me all the afternoon" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 36). Shortly after, McKee awakes and stumbles to leave the apartment; Nick promptly follows him:

> "Come to lunch some day," he suggested, as we groaned down in the elevator.
> "Where?"
> "Anywhere."
> "Keep your hands off the lever," snapped the elevator boy.
> "I beg your pardon," said Mr. McKee with dignity. "I didn't know I was touching it."
> "All right," I agreed, "I'll be glad to."

> ... I was beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in hands (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 37).

Every queer reading of *The Great Gatsby* analyses this scene as a clear representation and confirmation of Nick's queerness — see Fraser (1979), Wasiolek (1992), Tyson (2015) and Herman (2017). Here is why: first, Nick describes Mr. McKee with an adjective not much used to describe men of his period, *feminine.* He is also attentive to McKee's manners and physique, so attentive that he notices the lather on his cheekbones, gets worried about it the entire afternoon, cleans it when he gets the chance and leaves the party the moment he leaves as well. Then, there is the elevator scene; they *groan* into it, which is also a word not used to describe the action of entering an elevator (Herman, 2017). The elevator boy snaps as he tells McKee to keep his hands off the *lever*. This entire scene works as sexual innuendo, representing the action of transgressive sexuality which Nick and McKee are possibly about to get into.

Finally, the ellipsis. After that, Nick is observing McKee — who is in his underwear, between the sheets of his bed. Nick goes back home at four a.m. and the chapter ends. The ellipsis is the greatest sign that confirms the previous statement that Nick wants to hide something, and the fact that it was used between the suggestive elevator scene and being with McKee in his bed leads the reader to believe that what Nick is actually trying to conceal is his sexuality. What could have happened during the time occulted by the ellipsis? Well, through the queer gaze, taking into consideration the sexual and phallic innuendo of the elevator scene, Nick's sudden obsession for McKee and both of them being together in bed afterwards, it is possible to affirm that they had a homoerotic attraction followed by a most likely sexual relation.

3.1. Gay and Lesbian Signs in *The Great Gatsby*: Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby and Jordan Baker

The encounter with Mr. McKee is only in the second chapter and he is never mentioned again after that. Although it is an important queer moment in the novel, throughout the story, there are more queer elements from other characters as well as Nick, especially once he gets to know Gatsby and is involved in the drama he brings alongside him as the plot of the novel evolves.

Gatsby is, definitely, the most interesting part of the novel. Mysterious from the beginning, he is handsome, polite, rich, and throws extravagant, luscious parties. For queer theorists though, he remains a mystery. The only consensus among queer readings is about Nick's homosexuality and his romantic interest in Gatsby; the main reason for that is since Nick narrates the novel, readers only get his considerations of things. Not everything is as it seems, and actions or lines from Gatsby that could be seen as queer elements might have arrived to the readers through Nick's *I, as a witness* (Friedman, 1967)

narration and gay sensibility, that is, as a projection of his feelings for Gatsby. However, to confirm Gatsby's sexuality as gay or bisexual, or that he corresponds to Nick's feelings is not possible. The ambiguity of his character and personality is what makes him interesting from a reparative perspective: it leaves room for imagination.

On the other hand — from a paranoid point of view — many gay signs can be noticed in Jay Gatsby, signs that Nick would not be able to modify to fit into his narrative: the first sign is that, just like Nick, he hides his true self from the world. It is revealed by the end of the novel that Gatsby is of poor lineage and all his money comes from the illegal bootlegging business. However, before the exposure, Gatsby showed the world an idealised version of himself: affluent, educated, cordial and generous. He is obsessed with recreating the past and realising his dream: having the perfect life. To achieve perfection he believes that he needs prestige, richness and above all, he needs Daisy. Through a queer reading, he is performing how a successful white, straight man of his time was expected to be.

According to Tyson (2015), other signs come from the stereotypes associated with gay men by the heteronormative community: Gatsby is flamboyant and enjoys being perfectly groomed on all occasions. His clothes are usually of light colours and Tom Buchanan (who is the clear representation of a racist, homophobic man) cites Gatsby's suit in the novel in a derogatory manner: "'An Oxford man!' He was incredulous. 'Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit'" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 121). Furthermore, the way Gatsby possesses things can also be seen as a gay sign: his mansion is theatrically decorated with paintings and jewels collected by him in "Restoration salons [...] period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 90). Finally, apart from Daisy, he is not interested in other women at all: at one of Gatsby's parties, Nick notices that the man never danced with any woman and "no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder [...]" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 50). In addition, a close friend of Gatsby says that he is very careful about women and he "would never so much as look at a friend's wife" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 72).

Now, it must be observed that all of these characteristics are stereotypes and assuming someone's sexuality from them is not advisable nor correct. Tyson (2015) defines these as reductive gay signs that are given to the community by heteronormativity, for their way of viewing the queer community is prejudiced and shallow. Taking into consideration the novel's historical context, however, it makes sense that Gatsby could be interpreted as a gay character. In the 1920s queerness and the distinction between gender and sexuality were still not well developed and discussed, thus these stereotypes were often used as a form of assuming someone's sexuality.

Another character that also does not escape the queer narrative is Jordan Baker, Nick's *love interest*. Although they do have a romantic relationship, Nick's interest in Jordan comes across as odd. From all the characters, Fitzgerald chose Jordan Baker — whose name is unisex — to be Nick's affair (Tyson, 2015). Also, the character is a golf player: a profession at the time and still today predominantly masculine. Besides, the issue with the language reappears: when Nick describes how Jordan is attractive, he says her posture reminded him of "a young cadet" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 11). Her "hard, jaunty body" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 57) and how she wears all her attires "like sports clothes — there was a jauntiness about her movements [...]" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 50) is something he often points out. The fact that Jordan is bold, cynical, deceitful and dishonest does not faze him — perhaps because, again, he deals with her duplicity. In conclusion: all the characteristics that make Jordan appealing to Nick are usually associated with men and masculinity. Thus, it can be assumed that Nick was never truly romantically interested in Jordan, but in what she represented. As Tyson (2015, p. 332) explains: "Nick's attachment to Jordan seems as much the product of homoerotic as heterosexual attraction because he sees her primarily as a young boy".

Therefore, the object of Nick's most true interest becomes Gatsby: it is him whom he talks about in the most expressive, poetic way. If the level of Nick's attentiveness to details when describing someone was a contest, the one he has for Gatsby would surely win; on the very first time they meet, Nick saves up an entire paragraph just to describe the impact of Gatsby's smile on him:

> He smiled understandingly, much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced — or seemed to face — the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 48).

He continues on the next page by pointing out that while observing Gatsby all the music in the room "eluded me, because just as it began my eyes fell on Gatsby [...] His tanned skin was drawn *attractively* tight on his face and his short hair looked as though it were trimmed every day. I could see nothing sinister about him" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 49, emphasis added). Despite the strong impression Gatsby caused, though, in chapter four Nick narrates that he was not so convinced of Gatsby's perfection, feeling a bit overwhelmed and disconcerted. Even so, after a quick conversation, he seems to believe him and affirms that his "incredulity was submerged in fascination now" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 66). What is interesting to point out in this scene, is that Nick — a character that can be

read essentially as queer — seems to be the first person to see the fact that Gatsby was hiding something. In other words, he recognized in him a queer behaviour.

Those signs could explain why the two of them acquire a strong homosocial bond (Tyson, 2015) so quickly. This bonding could be homosocial in the sense of pure masculine friendship, or homosocial and homoerotic if Nick's queerness and expression of feelings are put into the equation. The interest Nick has in Gatsby makes him the most loyal of friends: he becomes his confidant, his helper and his defendant when Gatsby has none. When the truth about Gatsby's shady business is uncovered by Tom, and Myrtle Wilson is murdered, Nick still stays by Gatsby's side. It is important to mention that, at the time, Gatsby was the main suspect in the murder, for Myrtle had been hit by his car — the true murderer though is revealed to be Daisy. However, Nick does not seem suspicious or flabbergasted when he finds Gatsby hidden in the bushes of Tom and Daisy's yard; and he recognizes that: "I must have felt pretty weird by that time, because I could think of nothing except the luminosity of his pink suit under the moon" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 142). That comes as a peculiar, even tender thought to have about someone he had just discovered to be a fake, a liar and a potential murderer.

Yet, that is just how Nick sees Gatsby: even with the imperfections, he is still better than everyone else in the novel, "worth the whole damn bunch put together" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 154) as he says before saying goodbye to Gatsby for the last time. Wasiolek (1992, p. 18) argues that "at the end of the novel, it is Gatsby and Nick against the world [...] Nick favors Gatsby because he favors what Gatsby is, feels so intensely for Gatsby because he feels what Gatsby feels". That refers not only to their homosocial bonding but also sees them as same-sex doubles (Tyson, 2015): they are very similar in physical appearance, social and queer behaviour. Realising that makes it not surprising that when Gatsby has nothing more to do with Daisy, Nick decides to end his relationship with Jordan; he is mimicking what is happening in Gatsby's life.

The end of the novel is enlightening for queer reading because it is when Nick seems the most honest about how he feels about Gatsby: after a sleepless night, he gets up in a rush as he hears Gatsby arriving home. In Nick's words, "I felt that I had something to tell him, something to warn him about, and morning would be too late" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 146). Now, what Nick desires to say to Gatsby is a mystery, for he finds himself not able to say it. Instead, he spends the entire morning with him, listening to him tell the true story of his life and love for Daisy. It is in that moment as well that readers might notice the true reason why Gatsby wanted her so badly in the first place: "It excited him, too, that many men had already loved Daisy — it increased her *value* in his eyes" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 148, emphasis added). In the end, Gatsby's love is materialistic and Daisy is only a way of getting the perfect life. Just as Jordan is a symbol of normality to Nick, Daisy is one to Gatsby as well.

By the end of Gatsby's story, it is time for Nick to leave for work, but he cannot go because he sees himself trapped: "I didn't want to leave Gatsby. I missed that train, and then another before I could get myself away" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 153). From work, he tries to call Gatsby, but he does not pick up. He comes back to find Gatsby dead in his pool, murdered by Myrtle's husband in vengeance. Nick sees himself "on Gatsby's side, and alone" (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 164) and, indirectly, blames people like Tom and Daisy for his death and imagines that, in his last moments, Gatsby must have realised the mistake of putting Daisy as the sole dream and goal of his life. This can again be seen more as a projection of Nick's feelings than Gatsby's. The last chapter of the novel shows that, in essence, Gatsby and Nick are exceptional to each other: to Nick, Gatsby is the only good person amongst the rich folk, and to Gatsby, Nick is the only one who truly cares about him, even after his death.

4. Conclusion

In this queer reading of *The Great Gatsby* was discussed, initially, the issue of Nick's wish to be perceived as an honest and reliable narrator as the first gay sign of the novel; his actions and description of characters during the story show that Nick is hiding his true self. Later, how he relates to other characters is another sign of the initial assertion and adds to the queer reading: his possible affair with McKee is a key queer moment of the story. Also, he does not seem to care for women and only dates Jordan because she is a woman who reminds him of a man by performing masculinity through her personality and actions. Finally, the most honest display of his thoughts and feelings is given through his strong homosocial bonding and admiration for Jay Gatsby. This, in addition to the previous factors, enhances the statement of Nick Carraway's homosexuality and romantic feelings for Gatsby.

Taking into consideration the concept of queer reading as presented by Sedgwick (2002), a paranoid reading of the novel was shown through the analysis of the gay signs and moments displayed in *The Great Gatsby*; by acknowledging Nick Carraway's possible queerness, it was recognised a pattern in his behaviour, narration and in the way he relates to other characters — male and female. To perform a reparative reading of the novel, on the other hand, was not as simple since this position does not seek answers, but allows interpretations to come freely based on what the text has to offer. In this sense, to read *The Great Gatsby* reparatively is to accept the novel's ambiguity and subjectivity between lines (as in the elevator scene, for example). In this sense, Nick Carraway's sexuality remains unclear: he is not straight, but he is not gay either. This uncertainty also resides in Gatsby and Jordan's characters. Thus, instead of imposing concepts and beliefs on the characters — as done in the paranoid reading — readers can allow the novel to impose its concepts on them, to surprise them positively or negatively.

Through the presented analysis of Nick Carraway's gay sensibility, it could be seen why queer readers might identify with *The Great Gatsby*. Queering this novel means that readers get to see themselves in it and use it as a way of understanding more about themselves, their community and history. Nick Carraway resembles in many ways a closeted gay man, and in the period the novel was written and published (1920s), in order to survive, suppressing and hiding was the only safe option for queer people. Much of the queer reading is born from the desire the LGBTQIA+ community has for self-representation and finding traces of their culture in art (Stockton, 2023). Thus, queer reading as a form of queer criticism is not only a different and valid interpretation but also a form of enriching especially the reading of canonical literary works, bringing up and revealing new ideas about texts readers and critics thought they knew everything about.

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