



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **The Undeveloped Heart: Narratives of Love and Desire in A Room with a View (1908), The Return of the Soldier (1918) and The Great Gatsby (1925)**

Klaassen, Dewi

### **Citation**

Klaassen, D. (2022). *The Undeveloped Heart: Narratives of Love and Desire in A Room with a View (1908), The Return of the Soldier (1918) and The Great Gatsby (1925)*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3463396>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

The Undeveloped Heart: Narratives of Love and Desire in *A Room with a View* (1908), *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

By:

Dewi Klaassen (S2328429)



31 July 2022

Supervisor: Dr. M.S. Newton

Second Reader: Prof.dr. P.T.M.G. Liebrechts

MA Literary Studies: English Track

Leiden University

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Telling the Truth and Repressing Desires in Forster's <i>A Room with a View</i>	9
I. Stereotypes and Class Systems in <i>A Room with a View</i>	10
II. The Search for Truthful Relationships and Hope	19
III. Narration and a Happy Ending	22
Chapter 2. In Search of Oneself: Lost Desires, and Past Loves in West's <i>The Return of the Soldier</i>	28
I. The Fight between Past and Present in <i>The Return of the Soldier</i>	29
II. The Desire for a Cousin: Jenny's Narrative	33
III. A Not So Happy Ending	38
Chapter 3. The Great Dreamer: Chasing Past Desires and Loves in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	42
I. Daisy as the Object of Desire in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	43
II. Themes of Truth and Hope	46
III. The Pretenders: Losing Themselves and Others in their Destructive Desires	50
Conclusion	55
Works Cited	58

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Thesis Supervisor Dr. Michael Newton, who always supported my ideas and whose advice has been extremely helpful. Besides that, I also would like to thank my Second Reader Prof.dr. Liebregts for taking the time to read and assess my thesis. I am incredibly grateful for all the support my partner and family has given me during my studies. This thesis discusses untruthful relationships between the characters of the novels, and whether their love for each other is honest. However, I am a hundred percent certain that my love for you is true. Thank you from the bottom of my 'developed heart.'

## Introduction

Why did her tears reveal to me what I had learned long ago, but had forgotten in my frenzied love, that there is a draught that we must drink or not be fully human? I knew that one must know the truth. I knew quite well that when one is adult one must raise to one's lips the wine of the truth, heedless that it is not sweet like milk but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk forever queer and small like a dwarf. (West 136)

Here Rebecca West sets out much of the complexity that this thesis will analyze in its investigation of the development from adolescence to adulthood and the concept of 'truth.' This thesis explores three novels, E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* (1908), Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), that through a romantic love plot all consider the nature of hope and truth. Moreover, these novels examine how and why the characters repress feelings of desire and love. The reasons behind these repressions differ for each individual character: it could be a personal fear of strong emotions, or it could be so as to fit into society's conventional norms. When reading these novels, it becomes apparent that each frames a strong link between love, (erotic) desire, and the past. Especially in each book the journey into adulthood plays an important part in the lives of the characters.

While discussing these novels, it might seem that desire is a weakness. The characters yearn to acquire something that they do not have, and this can result in losing sight of who they truly are and what they do have. Because of this, the key of desire that these novels portray is the idea that only if one is able to achieve their goal, one will be fulfilled. However, this thesis argues that it is actually the yearning itself that the characters desire. They desire that feeling of hope and love, even if it means to relive an idealized delusion of the past. The following chapters illuminate this 'weakness' as some characters will completely lose

themselves in the delusion of (past) desires. For other characters, it is the repression of their desire that becomes their downfall. Per Bjørnar Grande suggests that when people desire, the key weakness is that they are unable to achieve those goals (155). However, 'weakness' feels like an inadequate term to use when it comes to desire, since desire can also endow someone with the strength to go after what they truly want. Therefore, this thesis will not bluntly insist that the desires of the characters weaken them, but will rather study how the characters manage their desires. Ultimately, this thesis argues that in *A Room with a View*, *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Great Gatsby*, the characters wish to escape their present adult life by repeating their time of adolescence, which is linked to the feelings of hope and sincere love. Specifically, this thesis focusses on repressed desires and love that link back to the past.

The process of growing up, and developing into an autonomous adult individual is an important shared theme found in all three novels. Each book discusses how their characters confront forces such as love, hope and desire while trying to attain an authentic identity. Furthermore, these novels depict individuals' psychological difficulties with independence and self-invention, which is disrupted by either social conventions, or fears (or amnesia) that the characters developed while growing up. In each novel, the characters are indirectly in search for who they are, since they do not know how to be truthful to themselves or others. Therefore, this thesis provides a close examination of the shared pattern of the disruptive nature of social convention, fear and memory loss on the pursuit of love. By analyzing the novels' content in depth, the thesis develops a clear overview of the authors' strategies regarding the use of symbolism, narrative disruption, authorial criticism, and irony. With this thesis, therefore, I have three aims. Firstly, to establish how the three novels depict the meaning of 'growing up.' Secondly, to analyze the key themes of (repressed) love and desire are represented in the chosen novels, and how these connect to the characters' memories of

the past. Thirdly, to consider the shared pattern of the disruptive social conventions on the pursuit of love.

The textual analysis conducted in this research project involves a formalist approach based on a close-reading of the three primary sources—*A Room with a View*, *The Return of the Soldier*, and *The Great Gatsby*—with a focus on their discussion of (repressed) desire and love. These matters necessarily involve the interpretation of subjective feelings, and as such this thesis cannot be limited to the discussing of ‘facts.’ Both within the novels and in this thesis, all is subject to interpretation. It might be considered common knowledge when I say that love can be complicated. Especially in these three novels, the reader encounters individuals who are engaged in trying to understand their own feelings and desires or who are equally busy denying themselves closer scrutiny of those feelings and those desires. Some embrace their desires entirely, but others repress themselves. One thing that the authors make very clear, is that they do not believe in the fairytale notion that ‘true love conquers all.’ This thesis is divided into three chapters, each concerned with one of the novels. Each chapter roots its analysis in the secondary criticism on each of the three novels.

The first chapter explores Forster’s novel *A Room with a View*, which concerns the developing relationship between the young and naïve Lucy and impulsive and lively George. The theme of class difference between the characters is key, and creates an obstacle for their love. Moreover, Lucy also fears love and intimacy which ensures her repression of those desires. Because of this, she decides to accept Cecil’s engagement and does this to avoid George and her feelings for him. Whereas Lucy is the master of repression, George cannot repress his desires for Lucy since they are too strong for him to handle. The novel is a witty social comedy that discusses the class system and repressed morals of Edwardian England, and how these clash with the intensity of life in Italy. In the middle of these two cultures is Lucy, the girl who is in search of herself. Helmut Gerber explains that: “[t]his increased

concern with worlds within led to the existential novel, to quests not only for the pot of gold or the Grail but also for the Self” (18). As part of this analysis, this thesis addresses Forster’s *Aspects of the Novel* (1962), which provides a means to look ‘through’ the novel, not ‘round’ it, as this was the driving force behind Forster’s book. It is also a useful source since it is written by Forster himself and therefore gives a clear insight of his intentions within the novel. When discussing Forster and *A Room with a View*, scholars have examined intercultural relations, religion, homosexuality, and the concept of love. For example, Suzanne Roszak considers “the portrayal of English social non-conformists in Forster’s Italy, individuals whose interactions with Italian people and landscapes inspire them to develop new ways of approaching class and gender as well as nation and ethnicity” (167). This thesis agrees with Roszak that the English characters develop new ideas on class and gender during their trip to Italy. However, more importantly for this thesis, the characters also developed a new way of approaching love and desire, especially Lucy. Jonah Corne and Ingrid Hotz-Davies have recently reconnoitred the presence of homosexual or ‘queer’ elements of Forster’s work, and how this has led him to look for spaces where a socially marginalised form of desire may flourish. However, not many have looked into the connection of internal feelings and the passing of time or growing up. Therefore, this thesis combines how the concept of love—and desire—is connected to the past and the development of the individual into adulthood. Since this novel is set in a shorter timespan than the other two that will be discussed, the past in *A Room with a View* refers to the trip to Florence but also the adolescent mindset and behaviour of the characters.

The second chapter focusses on Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, which presents the story of the soldier Chris who lost his memory due to shell shock, specifically of the last fifteen years of his life. Because of this amnesia, the novel creates a unique opening to discuss desires that are connected to the past. However, the amnesia also acts as a means to

discuss the consequences of war and how Chris tries to escape his memories of his time at the Front. Chris does not remember his marriage to Kitty and falls deeply into the delusion of his love for his past lover Margaret. Even though they parted fifteen years ago, when the two lovers meet again it seems as if nothing has changed. However, through the narration of Jenny, Chris's cousin, the reader learns that a lot has changed which further explains how much Chris and Margaret romanticise their relationship of the past. It is a novel that prioritizes the painful truth above hopeful love, while linking the two to the present and the past. Sadie Jones has written in an afterword to *The Return of the Soldier* on West's background and how that affected her writing. She asserts that:

Rebecca West was writing her first novel as she watched the First World War rupture the environment of her youth irreparably. In a novel written by a young woman looking about her at a warring world, there is very great sadness in the line, 'such a world will not suffer magic circles to endure.' (Jones 142)

Other scholars have studied this novel in relation to trauma, healing, masculinity, as well as the influence of war. For example, Misha Kavka explores the theme of masculine trauma in *The Return of the Soldier*, but also considers the novel an "ambivalent engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis" (1). As a reaction to contemporary reviews and criticism, Rebecca West made a statement in a letter to the editor of *The Observer* (June 24, 1928) about the origin and development of her novel. In this letter, she declares that St. John Ervine's criticism of John van Druten's theatrical adaptation of the novel contains a false statement (Hutchinson 66). West writes:

'Miss West's novel,' says Mr. Ervine, 'was written at a time when London's intellectuals were suffering from the first impact upon their minds of the Herren Jung and Freud, and were inclined to believe that a solution to all our ills could be found in

psychoanalysis ... Miss West's novel was, in brief, a modern Tract for the Times; it was brilliant journalism.' (*On The Return of the Soldier* 67)

With this letter, West affirms that her novel was in fact not inspired by psychoanalysis since this term was not yet spoken of. However, this does not mean that the novel cannot be discussed in a psychoanalytical context. The key themes in *The Return of the Soldier* are considerably psychological and therefore this thesis argues that it is legitimate to discuss the book in this way. As mentioned before, this thesis examines how love and desire is connected to the past of the characters. In this novel, the relationship between desires and the past is highly connected with mental traumas from the war.

Lastly, the third chapter considers *The Great Gatsby*. The thesis thereby explores these three novels both in order in which they were written, but also in the intensity of the character's desire for one another, as Gatsby is truly the most enchanted of them all. Gatsby is a mysterious character and the narration of Nick Carraway's point of view is the only information source that the reader has. Fortunately, Nick acts as a great, although sometimes ambivalent, observer who shares all his thoughts and speculations with the reader. Because of this, the reader learns that Gatsby could be considered an imposter by the high class society, who climbed his way up based on illusions and half-truths. The ambivalence of interpretation becomes a key factor in this novel, as the mysterious Gatsby leaves Nick—and therefore also the reader—in the dark about his past. Throughout the novel, Nick experiences Gatsby's breakdown in which more of his true nature becomes apparent and how much he is invested in his desire for Daisy. F. Scott Fitzgerald is central to the canon of American fiction, and many scholars have analysed his work. Initially, as Kirk Curnutt sets out in his chapter on the writer's critical reception: "Fitzgerald was stereotyped as a "facile" talent. Even after he realized his artistic potential in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), some critics assumed that the revelries it depicts (drinking and adultery) meant that he had yet to mature" (113). Since then,

Fitzgerald has seemed anything other than facile, and his work has been considered in relation to, among other matters, the historical context, queer relations, love and money, symbolism and class distinction. Laura Goldblatt notes:

Since the 1970s, scholars have generally emphasized the role of ideological formation and the influence of popular culture upon *The Great Gatsby*, a trend that has carried over to this day. In an essay from 2009, T. Austin Graham, for instance, examines Gatsby's phonic valence to argue that Fitzgerald frequently referenced popular rather than more highbrow songs, an insight that highlights the ephemeral and fleeting quality of many of the novel's most famously emotional scenes. Those scholars most interested in analysing *The Great Gatsby's* representation of the American Dream have, likewise, applied a cultural lens, tending to focus upon race and, to a lesser degree, class in the novel as a way to clarify the social scene in the US of the 1920s. (108)

Many critics have explored the environment in which *The Great Gatsby* takes place. Philip Beidler draws the book into the orbit of postwar novels and compares Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* with *The Great Gatsby* calling it its American counterpart. He notes:

Both, by conventional taxonomy, are considered major twentieth-century extensions of the novel of society; at the same time, both represent experimentalist departures in the tradition of the art-novel, with their striking innovations in form and narration, their complex psychological explorations of inner consciousness, their modernist fragmentations, juxtapositions, and economies in structure and point of view. (2)

As *The Great Gatsby* is a canonical novel when it comes to the Great War, this thesis will also discuss its connection with the war and how this psychologically influences the character's lives. Especially, it discusses how the war influenced the character's relationship with hope and love. All three novels have been studied within different contexts, this thesis demonstrates

how these novels link the past to idealized memories and desires, which consumes the protagonist's present. As mentioned above, there is extensive scholarly material about these works but to my current knowledge this thesis is unique in suggesting the connection between the past and romantic desires.

Chapter 1. Telling the Truth and Repressing Desires in Forster's *A Room with a View*

When one goes through the chapters of Forster's *A Room with a View*: 'lying to George,' 'lying to Cecil,' 'lying to Mr Beebe, Mrs Honeychurch, Freddy and the Servants,' 'lying to Mr Emerson,' it is immediately visible that the idea of truth is key in the novel. During Lucy's development into adulthood, she experiences multiple confrontations with her own truth and how she handles this. Besides Lucy, the reader learns about adult characters and the choices they made during their own development. Lucy's trip to Florence has been influential as she experiences a different way of thinking, and in the second part of the novel—when they are all back in England—Lucy often finds herself romanticising her past in Italy. Therefore, *A Room with a View* presents the confrontation of characters belonging to different backgrounds, both in terms of class (middle class and lower class), and cultures (English and Italian), and the consequences of this confrontation.

By ironically discussing these topics with the use of stereotypes, Forster 'mocks' the somewhat stuffy Edwardian English culture in his novel. Moreover, the use of stereotypes has helped Forster to discuss heavy topics in a rather light and witty way. The novel explores how social convention and fear of the unknown become obstacles for the characters when it comes to love. For example, the characters all show a difficulty with accepting or understanding their true feelings for another, which seems to originate out of fear for emotional bonding. This fear of intimacy is intertwined with a fear of losing control and a fear of the unknown. The protagonists are in a transitioning phase of their lives and they have to come to terms with growing up. However, with this, there are many new responsibilities that are attached to it. Throughout the novel, the reader learns about different characters and how each of them deals with their adulthood. For example, some repress their true selves in order to conform to society's expectations, whereas others have completely freed themselves from these conventions. There are also characters who are fixated on their past, or hold onto their past

selves which results in difficulties with their present lives. In *A Room with a View*, the characters' distrust of the heart and fear of forming close emotional relationships stand in the way of their true hopes and desires. The research of this chapter is grounded on secondary reading such as Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, intertwined with a close reading of the novel itself.

### I. Stereotypes and Class Systems in *A Room With a View*

As previously established, each character in Forster's novel portrays a certain stereotype which is connected to their class and social status. Forster introduces the first and main characters by means of dialogue, in which their role in society is already established. The novel begins with a conversation between Lucy Honeychurch and her cousin Charlotte Bartlett, who are displeased with their room since they do not have a view over the Arno. When Mr. Emerson—a 'lower-class' man—suggests that they might swap rooms, the reader can already sense the stereotypical attitude of Miss Bartlett, a traditional, older generation middle-class woman. Miss Bartlett immediately classifies the kind Mr. Emerson by using the words 'intruder' and 'ill-bred' to describe him during this first encounter. Nevertheless, when she first reacts to his suggestion, she says: "A view? Oh, a view! How delightful a view is!" (Forster, *A Room* 2). The interaction between these two characters already gives away their contrasting thought processes. Miss Bartlett assumes that the man is not safe to associate with because of his class. When Mr. Emerson only suggests the change of rooms, Charlotte immediately thinks about how it might appear to other people if she accepts his offer. That being said, Mr. Emerson simply explains how he and his son do not care as much about having a view as the ladies do.

In the novel, the Italian and English cultures are intensified in order to create two extremely different worlds that influence the protagonists. Moreover, Forster exemplifies the

two different cultures of Italy and England through its relationship with love and desire.

David Trotter asserts: “Italy awakens a fascination with violence and sensuality; in [which], lower-class Italians are introduced to exemplify a life lived according to instinct” (188). By comparing the Italian culture—which is portrayed as being intense and full of passion—to that of England—old-fashioned and repressed—Forster is able to hint his own opinion on contemporary British society. When thinking of these two different ways of living, George suits the Italian culture, since he lives on passion and instinct, and cannot repress his desire for Lucy. Lucy admires this of him and thinks of this way of living to be freeing, meanwhile the other characters from the middle-class society see it as troublesome.

Charlotte accompanies Lucy as her chaperone, which makes her act as if she only cares for Lucy’s well-being, while actually she is rather selfish. She thinks of her reputation above anything else, and deliberately uses her ‘selflessness’ as a means to portray herself:

‘The ground will do for me. Really I have not had rheumatism for years. [...] Imagine your mother’s feelings if I let you sit in the wet in your white linen.’ She sat down heavily where the ground looked particularly moist. ‘Here we are, all settled delightfully. Even if my dress is thinner it will not show so much, being brown. Sit down, dear; you are too unselfish; you don’t assert yourself enough.’ She cleared her throat. ‘Now don’t be alarmed; this isn’t a cold. It’s the tiniest cough, and I have had it three days. It’s nothing to do with sitting here at all.’ (Forster, *A Room* 65)

Even though, Charlotte might be unaware of her insincere selflessness, the reader sees through her façade with the help of the omniscient narrator who provides the reader of internal information. Charlotte’s actions throughout the novel have the biggest and most important consequences for the love plot. For example, when George and Lucy kiss in Italy, Charlotte is the only witness. Even though Charlotte and Lucy agree to keep this a secret, Charlotte is the one who breaks this promise and tells Miss Lavish about the scene. Because

of this, George and Lucy are later confronted with a literary representation of their kiss since Miss Lavish put it in her novel. This revival leads to their second kiss which again is initiated by the impulsive George who cannot control his desirous needs for Lucy. Moreover, in the end of the novel, when Lucy wants to repress her feelings for George, she comes across Mr. Emerson. This meeting might have been planned by Charlotte since she knew Lucy needed to have this final confrontation to understand and accept her true desires and love for George. Because of these important events in the novel, Charlotte proves indispensable for the true love plot of the novel. Besides this, it is possible that Charlotte has many regrets of her past choices as she ended up as a stiff spinster who only cares for polite ladylike behaviour. With this portrayal of her character, Forster implies the importance of Lucy's development and how Charlotte is a key example of not following one's true desires. Charlotte has lived a loveless life and even though she understands what love is, she simply cannot allow herself to be in the height of her emotions like that. These regrets could be a factor for Charlotte's meddling in Lucy's relationship as she sees this as an opportunity to relive her own past—and what she lacked in that—through the two young lovers.

Throughout the novel, Lucy needs a lot of guidance and praise from the other characters. In Forster's novel, there is a strong sense of sexual and romantic curiosity in Lucy which is grounded her adolescence and the development of new thoughts. Trotter claims: "stories about sexual awakening are shaped, more directly than other stories, by social conventions: what people agree to speak about, what they agree to be shocked about" (203). Because of this, the people that surround Lucy—and their morals—play an important part in her growing up. Forster uses a young and naïve protagonist so that the reader can clearly understand and witness how people develop themselves. Moreover, Forster confronts the reader with the different influences one can have on another, especially in a time of self-development. For example, after the storm incident in Italy, Lucy mentions she wants to be

truthful. However, she does not yet imply that this is about her love for George. When she decides to talk to Charlotte about the events, Charlotte immediately asks Lucy what she will do to silence him. This indicates that the event was ‘wrong,’ and Lucy does not find the courage to go after her true desires because of Charlotte’s strong opinion. Therefore, the novel’s main plot concerns Lucy and why she questions her role and place in society. Even though Lucy is adolescent, she comes across as ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘delicate’ in some scenarios since she adopts the behavior of the women that are present in her life. However, Lucy acts more freely and boyish when she is around Freddy—her brother—or other male characters in the novel. This inconsistency in Lucy’s personality traits suggests that she does not yet understand how to be her own true self, or represses to do so. However, throughout the novel, she develops herself and becomes more confident in her own independent thought processes. For example, during Lucy’s and Charlotte’s first encounter with the Emersons, Lucy is constantly ‘repressed’ by her cousin. However, later in the novel Lucy speaks up for herself and shares her own view and opinion on certain subjects:

‘Perhaps,’ said Miss Bartlett, ‘it is something that we had better not hear.’ ‘To speak plainly,’ said Mr. Eager, ‘it is. I will say no more.’ For the first time Lucy’s rebellious thoughts flare out in words—for the first time in her life. ‘You have said very little.’  
(Forster 53)

This shows the reader that she does not only repress romantic desires but also other ‘rebellious’ thoughts, which portrays her difficulty with becoming her own person in society. Moreover, the use of the word ‘rebellious’ indicates Lucy’s desire to go against the conventions in which she feels trapped. George Emerson acts as a love interest that supports Lucy in her self-determined awakening, however the novel also introduces Cecil Vyse, who—perhaps while being unaware of it—acts as an obstacle.

Cecil and George represent two different worlds: Cecil represents an adult, repressed, and constricted world, whereas George represents an adolescent, passionate and free world. Because of this, the Cecil and George portray two different stages in life, which is also indicated by the language that is used to describe them: “Cecil made one talk in his way, instead of letting one talk in one’s own way” (Forster, *A Room* 82). Cecil is strict with convention and rules, which will eventually repress Lucy, as a woman, but also as an individual since he forms the people that are around him to be more like himself. Whereas George is often compared to childish behavior: “why shouldn’t I be a baby?” [...] “he was a boy, after all” (Forster, *A Room* 204–205), which also portrays itself in his carelessness and impulsive actions. These two opposites are also symbolized in relation to the natural and domestic world, and more importantly to the ‘views’ that come with it. When she is with Cecil, he says:

‘I had got an idea—I dare say wrongly—that you feel more at home with me in a room.’ ‘A room?’ she echoed, hopelessly bewildered. ‘Yes. Or, at the most, in a garden, or on a road. Never in the real country like this.’ ‘Oh, Cecil, whatever do you mean? I have never felt anything of the sort. You talk as if I was a kind of poetess sort of person.’ ‘I don’t know that you aren’t. I connect you with a view—a certain type of view. Why shouldn’t you connect me with a room?’ She reflected a moment, and then said, laughing: ‘Do you know that you’re right? I do. I must be a poetess after all. When I think of you it’s always as in a room. How funny!’ To her surprise, he seemed annoyed. ‘A drawing-room, pray? With no view?’ ‘Yes, with no view, I fancy. Why not?’ ‘I’d rather,’ he said reproachfully, ‘that you connected me with the open air.’  
(Forster, *A Room* 103)

This conversation exposes the reader to Lucy’s true feelings for Cecil; Lucy feels repressed and stuck when she is with him as there is no ‘view.’ Moreover, there is no desire for each

other from both sides in this relationship, only the desire to conform to society's norm. This dialogue also expresses the discomfort of Cecil when he is confronted with his 'closeted' self. At one point, it is even questioned whether Cecil would be able to love a woman like heterosexual men do: "[y]ou cannot live with Vyse. He's only for an acquaintance. He is for society and cultivated talk. He should know no one intimately, least of all a woman" (Forster, *A Room* 163). This suggests that Cecil is not sexually attracted to women at all, but is hiding his true desires and identity for the sake of his reputation in 'society.' In contrast, the first time George kisses Lucy is in the middle of nature—an open flower field—which was also on top of a hill that looked over the valley. In this very moment, George is full of sexual desire for Lucy and cannot control himself when he is around her.

On the one hand, there is Cecil, who Lucy associates with 'a room without a view,' and on the other hand, there is George, who is associated to an open field where 'the view has no limits.' The 'views' in the novel symbolize hope, and with these two characters specifically, the reader witnesses the confrontation between hope, being truthful to oneself, and convention. With the possibility of Cecil being homosexual, the reader can sense the sorrow in his character that he has lost all hope, and therefore he represents this viewless room. Since Forster was a homosexual as well, this could be read as a critical response to contemporary society and how they repressed homosexuality. Moreover, it shows the reader the consequences that a narrow-minded conventional society can have on a queer person to the extent that they become hopeless, untruthful to themselves and closeted. In order to fit in, Cecil transforms into an irritated and angry man, who is unable to form personal relationships or emotional connections since he neglects his true desires. He lost his hope that society will accept him for who he truly is. According to Michael Echeruo: "Forster seems to suggest that the dissatisfactions of love, difficulties in personal relationships, and the pursuit of the wrong values in life, are all the product of the 'undeveloped heart,' of a personality that has not been

allowed to develop on its natural lines” (151). The representation of Cecil is that of an ‘undeveloped heart,’ as his development is mostly shaped by convention and not by himself. Whereas George and Mr. Emerson—his father—both developed themselves truthfully as their goal is to live happily despite what others might think. Moreover, they do not think about the duties and restrictions of conventional society when it comes to love. However, it is noteworthy to mention that these two men have less obstacles than Cecil when it comes to sexuality. When discussing Echeruo’s ideas of the undeveloped heart, one could say that George and his father are the only ones that have a ‘developed heart’ in the novel, and that Lucy desires for that same freedom of being able to express oneself truthfully. George and his father do not seem to contemplate the consequences of their actions, and even though this can be said for other characters as well, the main difference is that these two men do not care about what others think of them. The novel clearly portrays that convention is an obstacle for the Edwardian English society to form emotional connections. For example, when the party almost experiences an accident, the narrator mentions: “the older people recovered quickly. In the very height of their emotion they knew it to be unmanly or unladylike” (Forster, *A Room* 70). This implies that it is the standard for society to repress their deepest feelings. Moreover, Charlotte’s first impression of Mr. Emerson was that there was “something childish in those eyes” (Forster, *A Room* 2), which indicates the mindset of the English society. There is apparently a connection between youthfulness and strong emotions, and in order to grow up or become an adult one must learn to repress that. George and his father seem to be the only healthy parent-child relationship in the novel, which is because of the acceptance of their feelings.

Forster only introduces Lucy’s mother, Mrs. Honeychurch, in the second part of the novel. It is key that Lucy goes on her trip to Italy without a parental figure—Charlotte is her chaperone, however, Lucy does not look up to her and respects her as she would have a

parent. Because of this, Lucy cannot fall back on the mental support of a parent, and needs to figure out on her own what she wants and who she is. Mrs. Honeychurch would have had a major influence on Lucy's development in Italy, since she clings to traditional Victorian social norms and gender roles. For example, she cannot bear the fact that Miss Lavish, as a woman, is a novelist. However, her attitude towards Lucy is a kind and rather supportive one, "in these days young people must decide for themselves" (Forster, *A Room* 83), until Lucy drifts away from her mother's expectations. Mrs. Honeychurch does not understand Lucy's true desires, which eventually results in her being disappointed and confused. For example, when Lucy decides to form a relationship with George, Mrs. Honeychurch is angry with her. It seems that she would rather have the engagement between her daughter and Cecil, since that would have been conventional. However, when asked about Cecil, Mrs. Honeychurch replies:

'Well, I like him,' said Mrs. Honeychurch. 'I know his mother; he's good, he's clever, he's rich, he's well connected—Oh, you needn't kick the piano! He's well connected—I'll say it again if you like: he's well connected.' She paused, as if rehearsing her eulogy, but her face remained dissatisfied. She added: 'And he has beautiful manners.' (Forster, *A Room* 82)

This shows the main reasons, in her view, for marrying a 'suitable' man. However, it is clear that Mrs. Honeychurch is not speaking her mind truthfully. In fact, she does not like Cecil for who he is as a person, but prefers him over George because he is 'well-connected' in her known social circles. Because of this, Mrs. Honeychurch tries to justify this marriage to herself while knowing something is not quite right about it. Moreover, Mrs. Honeychurch has become so obsessed with convention, that it leads to a lack of emotional connection between her and Lucy. Convention is extremely embedded in her mother's upbringing and generation, so much that even if Mrs. Honeychurch wanted to change her point of view, she would not be

able to do so. When discussing Lucy's fear of love, it is noteworthy to discuss the relationship and presence of Lucy's parents. The reader only knows of her mother as Lucy only mentioned her father once saying he passed away. Without much information, the viewer does not know if Lucy has experienced love between her parents. If they did love each other fully, it might have scared Lucy when she witnessed what losing a loved one did to her mother. However, if the parents married for other reasons, Lucy might have lost all hope in love and cannot understand how those feelings work. Nevertheless, this is not mentioned in the novel. Because of the differences between Mrs. Honeychurch and her daughter, Mr. Emerson—who is present in Italy—becomes a father figure for Lucy and she listens to his advice, even though this goes against her chaperone.

Miss Lavish is a novelist within Forster's novel, who gives her own account of the love plot between George and Lucy in Florence. Compared to Forster, Miss Lavish tends towards a romantic novelist instead of a realistic one. However, this provides the reader of another point of view that tells the story of the two lovers in Italy. Her writing of the novel within Forster's novel shows how events can change when they are based on rumors. Lavish romanticizes the events that occurred in Florence, and makes them more sensual than they really were. Even though Lavish presents herself as this strong, independent woman, she is still part of the middle-class society that is more invested in gossip than actual political movements. Lavish heard from Charlotte about the lovers' kiss. Knowing Charlotte's character, in telling the story she would have been very negative about George and she would have portrayed Lucy as the victim. However, in Lavish's version it became a story of two lovers who yearned for each other's embrace. Therefore, in a rather clever way, Forster made sure her literary style befits her name. It also gives the reader insight of the desires of the novelist herself. Lavish romanticizes about sexual desire and makes it extremely prominent in her own version of the event. This is another example that Forster uses to indicate the lack of

intimate connections within the English society and how they secretly yearn for it. Ironically, because Lavish openly—but under a pseudonym—discusses her true desires through a love story, her version happens to be closer to the actual truth than Charlotte’s version, as Charlotte has to pretend to be disgusted and shocked by George and Lucy’s youthful desires.

It is noteworthy that in Cecil’s opinion the scenes about passionate desire and lust are ‘funny.’ This suggests that he no longer believes in such strong—sexual—desires for another person, let alone a woman. When Cecil reads Lavish’s novel, he mocks the sensual events:

‘There came from his lips no wordy protestation such as formal lovers use. No eloquence was his, nor did he suffer from the lack of it. He simply enfolded her in his manly arms.’ ‘This isn’t the passage I wanted,’ he informed them, ‘there is another much funnier, further on.’ (Forster, *A Room* 157)

Therefore, it is fair to say that the man with the undeveloped heart has become a rational hopeless man by the conventional middle-class society. Cecil’s actions are no longer instigated by his desires, his heart, but they are always rational, which—especially in a romantic’s opinion—cannot be the case when it comes to true love.

## II. The Search for Truthful Relationships

In the previous subchapter, it was discussed why the characters portray a certain stereotype. now I will go into more detail why those stereotypes have difficulty with forming relationships. In Forster’s *A Room with a View*, the reader experiences a lack of sincere emotions in the characters which prevents them to form relationships. The characters repress their true feelings in order to fit in, and the narrator confronts the reader with the character’s honest thoughts. As mentioned before, the novel links adulthood to dishonesty and convention, whereas adolescence is connected to intimacy and being truthful. This is clearly portrayed when the narrator describes Lucy’s image of sincere love:

She only felt that the candle would burn better, the packing go easier, the world be happier, if she could give and receive some human love. The impulse had come before today, but never so strongly. She knelt down by her cousin's side and took her in her arms. (Forster, *A Room* 75–76)

As a response, the reader discovers Charlotte's knowledge of her relationship with Lucy: "Miss Bartlett returned the embrace with tenderness and warmth. But she was not a stupid woman, and she knew perfectly well that Lucy did not love her, but needed her to love" (Forster, *A Room* 76). They both understand the difference between dishonest love and sincere love, but neither decide to speak up their mind and as a result their relationship stays shallow. Lucy wants to speak up and share her 'rebellious thoughts' about love, however her exemplars make her believe that this is unladylike. Nevertheless, the characters in Forster's novel yearn for sincere love.

The characters in the novel show that it is difficult to fully understand their own desires and their true selves as they are constantly shaped and criticised by society. As a result, it scares them to realize their yearning for deeper connections and emotions. During her development, Lucy is stuck between conformity and deviance. Moreover, Lucy has difficulty knowing herself and fears her new-found desires that she cannot share with anyone. This is because during Lucy's development into adulthood, the morals of the middle class have influenced her. For example, when everyone in the middle class is hiding their true feelings and thoughts, it is difficult to form a loving relationship. The reader cannot assume that the characters—even the married ones—are truthful to themselves or others. Therefore, it is uncertain whether Lucy has ever experienced a deeply loving relationship, even with her parents. It seems that repressing one's true feelings is necessary to play a role in their society. This influence is visible when Lucy has to decide between the two men. Lucy chooses the safe option, which is Cecil Vyse, but actually she desires George. His lifestyle fascinates her

more, but since it is so different from what she knows, it also frightens her. Lucy often wishes that she is able to form truthful relationships with the people around her, even with her cousin “[s]he still clung to the hope that she and Charlotte loved each other, heart and soul” (Forster, *A Room* 76).

The fact that Lucy never had a parental figure in her life with whom she is able to discuss such feelings of love and desire is key to understand her development, especially when it comes to Lucy’s fear of love. Even though she is still adolescent, it seems that she had to ‘grow up’—repress her thoughts and feelings—too quickly and is now stuck in situation without understanding the confrontation between her duties and desires. In *A Room with a View*, Forster notes:

The contest lay not between love and duty. Perhaps there never is such a contest. It lay between the real and the pretended, and Lucy’s first aim was to defeat herself. As her brain clouded over, as the memory of the views grew dim and the words of the book died away, she returned to her old shibboleth of nerves. She ‘conquered her breakdown.’ Tampering with the truth, she forgot that the truth had ever been. Remembering that she was engaged to Cecil, she compelled herself to confused remembrances of George: he was nothing to her; he never had been anything; he had behaved abominably; she had never encouraged him. The armour of falsehood is subtly wrought out of darkness, and hides a man not only from others, but from his own soul. (159)

While trying to understand her own mind, Lucy pretends that her feelings for George are all wrong because of her engagement to Cecil. However, as Forster suggests in this passage, her first aim was to ‘defeat herself’ which refers to accepting Cecil’s engagement. This is not truthful to herself, since these are not her real desires and goals in life. Moreover, it is her fear of finding her true self and true love which makes her flee from committing to a relationship

with George. It takes a lot of courage for a woman to break from convention—especially in an era full of new anxieties and crises. Charlotte is the female character who is holding onto convention the strongest, and therefore she is sometimes pitied by the other women in the novel. In the end, however, she is redeemed by George and Lucy who think that Charlotte might have set things up for them to come together instead of breaking them apart. As mentioned before, there is a possibility that Charlotte wanted to redeem herself and give Lucy the courage to take the chances Charlotte never took for herself. However, Forster left Charlotte's thought process around George and Lucy's relationship ambiguous, and therefore without this insight it is left for the reader's interpretation whether she has helped the couple or not. This actively challenges the reader to think about the influence and intentions of outsiders, not only in this novel but also in their own life.

### III. Narration and a Happy Ending

In order to understand the love plot in *A Room with a View* it is important to look at Forster's reasons behind the choices when it comes to the subject of 'love.' In Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, he sets out several reasons why love is so prominent in (his) novels:

When the novelist ceases to design [their] characters and begins to create them, 'love' in any or all of its aspects becomes important in [their] mind, and without intending to do so [they] make [their] characters unduly sensitive to it—unduly in the sense that they would not trouble so much in life. The constant sensitiveness of characters for each other—even in writers called robust like Fielding—is remarkable, and has no parallel in life, except among people who have plenty of leisure. Passion, intensity at moments—yes, but not this constant awareness, this endless readjusting, this ceaseless hunger. I believe that these are the reflections of the novelist's own state of mind while

[they] compose, and that the predominance of love in novels is partly because of this.

(62)

Forster claims that the love portrayed in novels is mostly untrue or unrealistic because of the intensity of it. In *A Room with a View*, the intensity between George and Lucy is very prominent especially when they are close to one another it seems like Lucy cannot think of anything else except their shared moments in Italy. However, the reader does not hear much from George's point of view—even though his actions speak for themselves. Moreover, Lucy is still adolescent and this period of one's life is also connected to the passionate awakening of a person. Another reason behind the subject of love which Forster sets out in his *Aspects of the Novel* is that:

Love, like death, is congenial to a novelist because it ends a book conveniently. [They] can make it a permanency, and [their] readers easily acquiesce, because one of the illusions attached to love is that it will be permanent. Not has been—will be. All history, all our experience, teaches us that no human relationship is constant, it is as unstable as the living beings who compose it, and they must balance like jugglers if it is to remain; if it is constant it is no longer a human relationship but a social habit, the emphasis in it has passed from love to marriage. (62)

In this passage, Forster associates the concept of time with love. In this case, it is the duration of love which supposedly in novels hints to eternity. It is understandable that most romantic novelists' goal is to portray this fairytale-like scenario of 'happily ever after.' However, Forster, West and Fitzgerald did not completely agree to these happy endings. Even though, Forster did end his novel with the victory of love, his appendix shows the reader that the love between Lucy and George was still challenged by the war. For example, George did not stay monogamous when he was away fighting. This shows the reader that even though love is a very prominent theme in novels, it is not realistic to think that it is the only thing that matters

in someone's life. There are still a lot of other important things that can make someone feel complete, broken or (un)happy. In addition, Forster mentions that no human relationship is constant, and there are always other factors and people that positively or negatively intervene with relationships (*Aspects* 63). *A Room with a View* acts as a great example for this thought, as the relationship between Lucy and George did not occur on its own strength. Forster also argues that: "Any strong emotion brings with it the illusion of permanence, and the novelists have seized upon this. They usually end their books with marriage, and we do not object because we lend them our dreams" (*Aspects* 63). Knowing this, it is noteworthy that Forster wrote his appendix in order to explain certain choices in his novel, but also to make the ending more grim and realistic when it comes to the permanence of love. Whereas, in his homoerotic novel *Maurice*, Forster did decide on a happy ending, which indicates the author's own dreams and desires:

It is a novel with a purpose, and the purpose is to proclaim that homosexual love, in its fullest sense, can be happy and enduring. [...] It rings artistically quite wrong, as a wish-fulfilment: and yet anyone who reads it will hope, without any knowledge of the biography, that for the writer the wish ultimately came true. (Matthew Curr 67)

Nevertheless, this novel was published posthumously which erases the possibility to write an appendix for it.

Throughout the novel, the reader is able to understand the characters through different point of view narrations. In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster discusses specific point of views that novelists can use for their texts: "[t]he novelist [...] can either describe the characters from outside, as an impartial or partial onlooker; or [they] can assume omniscience and describe them from within; or he can place himself in the position of one of them and affect to be in the dark as to the motives of the rest; or there are certain intermediate attitudes" (85–86).

In order to create a more realistic feel to the novel, Forster made the character unaware of each other's and even their own feelings. Mr. Beebe might be the only character without his own personal agenda. He is trying to help the people around him, and his perspective gives an impartial point of view of the characters he interacts with, which also helps the reader form their own opinion about the events of the novel. Knowing this, his character is quite similar to Nick Carraway, who narrates *The Great Gatsby*. Forster also introduces the reader to Miss Lavish—a popular novelist—who creates her own version of Lucy's awakening which is derived from the other characters. With the use of Miss Lavish, Forster is able to mock romanticised novels, as the reader knows the real story and can compare the two narrations of it. Moreover, Forster uses a technique called 'authorial intrusion,' which enables him to break from the usual narration in order to directly address the reader. By using this intrusion, Forster can create a relationship between himself and the reader. It also ensures that the reader has a better understanding about the events than the characters in the novel themselves. For example, in chapter fourteen, Forster writes:

It is obvious enough for the reader to conclude, 'She loves young Emerson.' A reader in Lucy's place would not find it obvious. Life is easy to chronicle, but bewildering to practice, and we welcome 'nerves' or any other shibboleth that will cloak our personal desire. She loved Cecil; George made her nervous; will the reader explain to her that the phrases should have been reversed?" (*A Room* 139)

This intrusion creates a new environment for the reader in which they can recontextualize the situation Lucy is in. Moreover, it makes the reader aware of how they might act themselves when it comes to repressing love and desire. It also breaks the wall between the story and the reader which makes the story less realistic as the reader is made aware that everything is fictional. Moreover, *A Room with a View* portrays reasons why true love is not as easy as it is said to be in most romantic novels that end with 'happily-ever-afters.' Therefore, by

addressing the reader, Forster creates a new layer to the plot in which the reader is challenged to delve into someone else's—or even their own—thought process on the topic. By confronting the reader directly with the difficulty of figuring oneself or others out, Forster is able to make the reader aware of their own repressed desires or identity.

Fifty years after Forster published the novel, in 1958, he wrote an appendix to *A Room with A View* which he titled 'A View without a Room.' In this appendix, he poses the following question: “[the novel] contains a hero and heroine who are supposed to be good, good-looking and in love—and who are promised happiness. Have they achieved it?” (209). After which he presents the reader with how Lucy and George's life developed after the novel. There is no definite answer to the question: 'have they achieved happiness?,' that is for the reader to decide after reading how the characters continued living their lives. However, when close reading this appendix, there are some hints towards Forster's own intentions. The couple lives through two wars, during the second of which George cheats on Lucy, and Lucy becomes homeless. There is an important connection here between homelessness and a break in their relationship, in both one loses a feeling of safety. Other people that they loved died or were killed. A potential message that Forster is conveying with this appendix is that war changes someone's view on hope and love. In *A Room with a View* and its appendix, Forster subtly changed the title to 'A View without a Room.' As mentioned before, the 'views' in Forster's novel symbolize hope. Therefore, when the 'rooms' can be considered the characters in the novel, the appendix suggests that the characters have lost their hope because of the war. Moreover, happy endings are unrealistic. On the one hand, the couple have loved each other and lived a pleasant life with children. On the other hand, this is where a romantic novel usually would stop, but realistically this is not where the lives of the characters stop. With this appendix, Forster made sure to stay realistic and was perhaps not pleased that his novel had initially a 'happy ending.' Moreover, the appendix shows that true love—and hope—can be

broken or separated because of influential changes in the environment of the characters. Lucy and George have found happiness, but just like true love, this is not eternal. Realistically, in a complete life there is happiness but also sorrow, which Lucy and George have both experienced together and separately.

Chapter 2. In Search of Oneself: Lost Desires, and Past Loves in West's *The Return of the Soldier*

The word 'return' in the title can be interpreted in multiple ways, of which several are immediately clear. Of course, the term 'return' refers to time, since it is about something that comes back from the past. The soldier Chris physically returns from fighting the war to his house. This takes place in the beginning of the novel, and would be the most general interpretation of the title, however there are also other possibilities of interpreting Chris's return. For example, during his amnesia, Chris mentally goes back or returns to his younger self when he was in love with Margaret. It is even arguable that Chris returned to his true self before he was shaped by society. Moreover, during this stage in the novel, Margaret's desire and love also returns to Chris, even though she is already married to another man. Later in the novel, Chris's repressed memory of his present life and marriage returns to him. Therefore, he is 'returned' to health, sanity, but also sorrow. Lastly—although this is not specifically mentioned in the novel—since Chris is 'cured' of his shell shock, there is a strong possibility that he has to return to the Front. One could argue that the title refers mostly to the last part of the novel when Chris has his memory back thus making him fully 'returned.' However, this chapter will discuss the importance of the story before Chris is cured, in which the reader learns about the characters and how they deal with trauma, hope and love. In her letter on *The Return of the Soldier*, West explains the point of her story:

The point of the story is this: That the sweetheart to whom the soldier turns discovers after a time that he and his wife had had a child some years before who had died. His wife has not reminded him of this because she was jealous of his love for it; he would not inquire because his whole mind was shrinking from her. Immediately the sweetheart (Margaret) knows that if the soldier (Chris) were reminded of the child it would stir such depths in him that the whole of his past life would come back to him.

This is not by any means orthodox psycho-analysis; in fact, I doubt if any psychoanalyst would believe in a cure so sharply effect. (West 68)

Therefore, the novel portrays a romanticised version of a mental illness that could be cured by the love the soldier felt for his son. Moreover, the characters in the novel are trying to escape the negative sides of strong feelings, such as pain and sorrow by avoiding the truth and holding onto the past.

### I. The Fight between Past and Present in *The Return of the Soldier*

In her novel, Rebecca West creates a connection between the past and hope, which ensures that Chris wants to escape the present in order to find new hope. Since Chris has had a traumatizing experience fighting in the war, he desires to go back to the time before that and to escape from his traumas. However, since this escapism of the present is grounded on desires—he is seeking a time full of hope and love—Chris romanticises the past. Because of this, the romanticisation of the past influences his perception of the present. Therefore, Chris romanticises the past but also has a wrong perception of the present, which makes him delusional about both as he has lost sight of the truth. For example, Chris has been negative about Margaret in the past which he cannot recall. Rachel Bryan mentions: “the occasion he caught her ‘larking’ in a rowing boat with a local ‘bounder,’ or the realization that he couldn’t trust her ‘as he would trust a girl of his own class’” (264). This idealising of the past is also present in another novel that will be discussed which is *The Great Gatsby*, but also in *A Room with a View* there are clear references to ‘immature’ behaviour that are linked to honesty, love and an ideal state of mind. Moreover, in the present, Chris cannot stand Kitty and is negative about her characteristics. This dislike of his wife could be founded in the frustration that Chris holds about his life choices that he made during his adolescence. Growing up is something the main character is able to mentally avoid while being amnesic. Moreover, Chris feels as if he is

able to change these life choices that he made in his adolescence; he feels as if he is given another chance. Even though the women tell him the truth about his memory loss, he does not accept it and goes after his own (past) desires. Through this experience, he is freed from his duties as a husband, and his new goal is to relive the past of innocent and simple love with Margaret. Margaret is another character who regrets the choices she has made, which is why she goes along with the fantasy between her and Chris.

Just like *A Room with a View*, the novel confronts the reader with two different representations of love. On the one hand, there is the forced and planned love between Kitty and Chris, which is likely to be chosen for security of class and social rank. This is never specifically stated in the novel, however the reader does know that Chris broke up with Margaret because he could not marry a girl of her social status, which suggests that after this he had to search for a woman based on her class. On the other hand, there is the impulsive love between Margaret and Chris, which is based on true feelings for each other as is shown during their reunion. His relationship with Margaret represents his past, when he was adolescent, while the relationship with Kitty represents the adult present. While Chris finds himself in a dilemma between his wife and his past lover—who is from a lower class but warm and kind-hearted—he also struggles with social convention and his trauma. There are more factors in his life that influence his thoughts which makes the truth even more difficult to grasp. Mara Scanlon notes: “Although Margaret has, and deserves, Chris’s deepest, joyful love, the relationship is impossible for a number of social reasons; he must accept, however unhappily, his place in the class, estate home, and marriage where he ‘belongs’” (67). With this plot, West portrays the hardships of love and that life is not like a fairytale in which true love always succeeds and happy endings exist. Moreover, West is critical of the class system, because the lovers clearly want to be together but because of their places in society they are obligated to let each other go. Besides that, Chris is still mentally hurt from the trauma that

occurred in the last fifteen years of his life. During his amnesia, he is unaware of his trauma and therefore seems to be a happier person in the illusion of the past. However, this repressing is not the right coping mechanism to heal from his trauma and this is something that Kitty, Jenny and later on also Margaret understand.

One of the more unfair aspects of the relationship is that there is no specific reason for Chris not to choose Kitty. In *The Great Gatsby* for example, Daisy's husband is having an affair, and their marriage is clearly not a happy one. Therefore, her relationship—or 'affair'—with Gatsby is easier to accept for the reader. In *The Return of the Soldier*, the reader does not have such knowledge about the marriage between Kitty and Chris to draw conclusions, since Jenny mainly discusses the events that are taking place in the present. When Jenny refers to the past, she does not mention the nature of Kitty and Chris' marriage, except for the shared loss of their son. Kitty is clearly a very materialistic woman and this suggests that she is content with her luxurious life in the higher class of society. When Jenny describes Kitty, she often mentions her physical appearance and the use of expensive materials such as 'silk' or 'tortoise shell.' This luxurious language that is used to describe Kitty portrays her distance to real life. It ensures that Kitty is portrayed as a princess who has not experienced hardships. Moreover, her attitude seems to be connected to the inability to form an emotional connection with her husband. For example, when Chris was away for the war, Jenny says: "I wish we could hear from Chris. It is a fortnight since he wrote" (West 9). To which Kitty answered: "ah, don't begin to fuss" (West 9), as if she does not worry about him at all. However, this narration is from Jenny's point of view—who is very interested in Chris herself—and she has not experienced the loss Kitty has as a mother.

It is clear that the characters in this novel do not know how to deal with pain—or mentally heal from trauma—and therefore they try to push it away, change the subject or

forget it. The novel also indicates that there is a different stigma for men when it comes to expressing one's traumas and feelings. Kafka asserts that:

It is not just that soldiers return 'ill' from war, but that the social order is evacuated of its center by the trauma of war. Psychological illness, we should remember, is measured not according to individual suffering but according to its disparity from the social norm, and when England's young men suffer breakdown en masse, illness measures the extent to which the social order has slipped from its own notion of the normative. (4)

With this in mind, it is important to understand that the novel only reveals the events through Jenny's eyes, who is a middle-class woman. The attentive reader would notice that there is a similar pattern between upper-middle class society and conventional or materialistic interests in *A Room with a View*. In both novels, the novelists portray the upper or middle class society as if they mostly care for their reputation in society and materialistic worth. Moreover, in each novel, the protagonist is stuck in the higher class society and is confronted by their love for someone from a lower class. Whereas George is the opposite of Cecil in Forster's novel, Margaret is the opposite of Kitty in West's novel. For example, Margaret is described as being physically weathered by hard work and hardship whereas Kitty is always presented as a porcelain doll. From Jenny's point of view, even though Margaret might have been pretty once, her poverty changes this and Jenny describes this state of being as: "even a good glove that has dropped down behind a bed in a hotel and has lain undisturbed for a day or two is repulsive when the chambermaid retrieves it from the dust and fluff" (West 16). Because of this interaction between the ladies, it is clear that Kitty and Jenny—in the beginning of the novel—attach someone's worth to their social class. However, Chris looks differently at their class differences when he returned from the war. It is almost as if adulthood is connected to the repulsion of the lower class, and since Chris thinks he is his younger self he has forgotten

such prejudices. For example, Jenny thought that he would dislike present Margaret, however he did not seem to notice—or care—how much she had changed after the last time they saw each other.

## II. The Desire for a Cousin: Jenny's Narrative

When reading West's novel, the reader must consider the importance of the narrative perspective instead of only focussing on the love plot. It was previously established that it is key to understand that the narrative is from a middle-class woman's perspective. Now I will go into more detail about the role of Jenny's narrative and why it forms the novel. Scanlon notes that Jenny "has traditionally been discussed as a detached observer or unreliable raconteur of the narrative's wartime love triangle" (66). However, Scanlon's work suggests that Jenny could also be understood "not only as one who tells the story, but as one who reads and interprets it" (66). Therefore, *The Return of the Soldier* is a unique 'war' novel since it is about the consequences of World War I, but the story does not take place where the fight is actually happening. Comparing it to *The Great Gatsby*, they are both critical about how the war can change people's mind on hope and love. However, the narration between the two novels is different. West uses Jenny as a female narrator to introduce the reader to the war without having proper knowledge of what happened at the Front. In *The Great Gatsby*, which will be discussed in chapter three, the narrator—Nick Carraway—has experienced the war as a soldier himself. This contrast between the two novels shows the uniqueness of Jenny as a narrator in a war novel.

Positioned as a distant narrator, Jenny observes and even absorbs the other characters by occasionally taking over their entire identity or feelings towards a certain event or person. For example, when Margaret and Jenny are in the nursery, they "kissed, not as women, but as lovers do" (West 138). In this moment, it seems like Jenny takes over Chris's desire to kiss

his past lover as if she was Chris herself. Because of this, West is able to give a more complex narration since Jenny takes over different perspectives. However, this also makes her an unreliable narrator. Some scholars suggest that this scene indicates a romantic desire between the two women. However, Scanlon asserts that Jenny is so obsessed with observing the others that she merges into their personalities and desires. This makes her another character that is running away from her own troubles and feelings, just like Charlotte. Both women meddle with other people's relationships in order to escape from their own needs. On top of that, Scanlon argues that:

[Jenny] unsettles her gender identity through zealous identification with her male cousin Chris, even attempting to psychically access the masculine battlefield. Jenny's desire, class allegiance, and gender identity, all complicated by her reading practice, challenge the novel's stated moral and its seemingly inevitable conclusion. (66)

As Forster mentioned in his novel, it is easier to comment on a situation as an outsider. The people who are involved usually have difficulty with understanding their own feelings. In this novel, it is Jenny who wants to comment and act as an outsider but also has difficulty doing so as she becomes too attached to the other characters.

The fluidity of Jenny's narrative has different consequences for the reader's perception of her. On the one hand, Jenny is a very present character and her narration is prominent for the reader's perception of the other characters. On the other hand, she loses her own individuality since the reader is not sure from which perspective she is observing the love plot. Moreover, Jenny represses herself and her own romantic desires by focusing on the others. However, these desires are visible to the reader through the language she uses to portray Chris, but also through her jealousy towards Margaret and how in some instances Jenny identifies as Kitty. Besides that, Jenny identifies as Chris himself, which shows an obsessive nature of her desire for him. West's decision to make Jenny the narrator is a

particularly thoughtful part of the story, since it allows the text to have an internal view on repressed desires and what that can do to someone mentally. By having this insight, the reader can identify more with Jenny and is not easily fooled by her partial perspective. Therefore, Jenny should not be considered a plain observer, since she is plainly in love with Chris and this makes her a pawn in the game of love.

Since narration is an act of interpretation and shaping events, it can be compared to the work of a constructive reader. As mentioned before, Jenny's role is both powerful and vulnerable because of her position as narrator but also as a character who is repressing her own intentions and desires. Jenny's encounter with Margaret necessarily changes her in profound ways, especially her privileged mindset of class distinction. The novel clearly discusses the problematic nature of class. For example, Margaret came into poverty because of her marriage, which would have been different if she married a rich man from a higher class. This suggests that class has nothing more to do with the political and social scheming of one's life, instead of living its truth. Moreover, this suggests the instability of life for women, who were dependant of the men—and their social status, income and class—in their lives. With Chris's amnesia and his desire for Margaret, Kitty's life becomes full of uncertainties in which she questions her past choices and the 'love' she shared with Chris. Jenny is a comforting character for Kitty as she is always there for her. However, also when Margaret is visiting, it seems as though Jenny is the only one actively listening to her story. Because of this, Scanlon states:

Jenny's emotional identification shifts, and eventually she positions herself less with Kitty, who is side-lined from the primary action in her fury ('Kitty lay about,' we are told, 'like a broken doll'), and more within the narrative of the past and present love affair. Desiring Chris as Jenny does, her readings of the adored Margaret are

sometimes fraught with extreme envy. She admits, for example, that ‘the truth is’ she ‘was physically so jealous of Margaret that it was making [her] ill.’ (72)

This shift in Jenny originates in her desire for Chris and his desire for Margaret. Moreover, her adoration of Chris changes her perception of Margaret. After Chris’s return, Jenny is trying to understand why he desires Margaret’s company more than he does that of Kitty and herself. Because of the complex love plot between these characters, the text discusses the influences that desire can have on people and how it can change their perspectives. However, as mentioned before, Chris does not only desire Margaret for the person she is, but also the idealized memories of them together. The novel also indicates the difficulty to fully commit to one’s desire—especially for women—since life can become very difficult when you are totally dependant on the other people in your life.

In *The Return of the Soldier*, as the title might already suggest, the concept of war is key. From her own perspective, Jenny has failed to protect Chris from the war. Because of this, she is committed to protecting him again after his return. However, this time Jenny wants to protect Chris from his prominent distress, and thus she helps him setting up a rendezvous with Margaret. Wyatt Bonikowski argues: “just as Chris's bad temper can break into the happy stability of Baldry Court, the hands of the state can enter to snatch him away to the front. For Jenny this failure to protect Chris is a personal one” (522). When Jenny mentions their home she says: “We had made a fine place for Chris” (West 9), which suggests the importance of protecting Chris. However, Jenny’s personal goal to keep Chris satisfied—and away from the war—has failed, and because of this, the tone of her retrospective narration is full with regret and guilt. Bonikowski notes: “like a traumatized soldier, Jenny is plagued by nightmares of war, revealing not only a desire to understand his experience but also to suffer along with him” (522). As mentioned before, Jenny merges with the other characters, and a reason behind this is that she desires to experience their lives. For example, her nightmares

about the front reveal a desire to understand Chris's experience. However, Jenny remains in the position of the observer, distant from the true experiences of the war.

The novel also emphasizes the denial of war experiences which structures the characters' relationships to pain. Whereas Jenny is worried about Chris when he is away, Kitty only denies that something may have happened to him. Moreover, the language use of the characters portrays the difficulty of speaking of war neurosis as a wound, since such an injury is mostly used to describe physical instead of psychological damage. Margaret has difficulty to describe Chris's wound that does not have any external signs. Because of this, it is not surprising that Jenny and Kitty have trouble understanding her: "Our faces did not illumine" (West 18). The women seem to have no experience with wounds that lie beneath the surface, especially when it comes to men. However, Jenny and Kitty are not alone in their inability to understand the invisible injury of shell shock. Bonikowski explains:

The medical and military establishment during the First World War spent years debating whether shell shock was biological or psychological in origin, whether soldiers suffering from shell shock were 'wounded,' according to the terms of battle, or merely sick. (524)

In the novel, West also notes this topic through Jenny's narration: "here we had nourished that surpassing amiability which was so habitual that one took it as one of his physical characteristics, and regarded any lapse into bad temper as a calamity startling as the breaking of a leg" (10). Yet again, Jenny and Kitty were not able to understand Chris's mental problems or internal feelings and treated it as physical injury. As West argues in her letter, she was fascinated by war amnesia which eventually inspired this novel. In the novel, West underscored the ambiguity of the term shell shock, by differentiating between 'concussion' and 'shell shock:' "I don't know how to put it... he's not exactly wounded... a shell burst.'... 'concussion?' suggested Kitty" (18). Chris is another character that denies and represses

hurtful feelings. Already before his shell shock, Chris shared the same traits of denial as Kitty does. For example, it was his decision to keep the nursery as it was even after his son had passed away. Because of this, the novel suggests that the characters deny internal pain by escaping the truth and to live in their own illusions. However, in the final pages, the characters have to accept this truth “she repeated, ‘the truth’s the truth,’ smiling sadly at the strange order of this earth” (West 138), and the reader experiences what this does to the characters and how it breaks their protective shield of happiness.

### III. A Not So Happy Ending

In the end, the women decide that Chris needs to go back to his adult, unhappy self because of his responsibilities and social role as a husband and man. With this ending, the novel portrays that the middle-class priority is to conform to societal norms, but also one’s duties instead of hope and happiness. Kafka argues that: “the amnesic Chris revels in his return to late boyhood and his first love. Rather the problem is that without the centering presence and financial support of their man, Jenny and Kitty’s lifestyle loses its justification, let alone its possibility, and their world loses its moorings” (3–4). This explanation is a possibility for the final decision of the women, however it is arguable that it is not only because of their need of Chris. On the one hand, the novel confronts the reader with a realistic—or perhaps pessimistic—view on adulthood and responsibilities, in which hope, love and desire are powerless against social conventions. Moreover, a man could not afford to lose his ‘masculinity’—being secure in one’s mental health and financial wealth—in the eyes of society. On the other hand, the women’s decision is understandable; even though they love Chris, they do not recognize him while he suffers from his shell shock. Moreover, they realize that he could not truly be happy when he was not aware of his present life. Therefore, one

could say that Chris is given a choice at the end of the novel if he would still go after Margaret now he remembers his last fifteen years.

When Chris returns from the war, he is unable to accept the truth and the duties that come with it such as taking care of his present household. However, it is questionable that this present 'truth' is originated from truthful feelings towards each others. For example, when Chris asks about Kitty, his reaction is: "I don't like little women and I hate everybody, male or female, who sings. O god, I don't like this Kitty" (West 33). Whereas his feelings for Margaret have not changed after the war, and her poverty did not scare him away nor changed his thoughts about her. However, even though his feelings for Margaret might have never changed, Chris himself did change because of the war. Kafka asserts that Chris acts as a shell of the man he used to be, but now he expresses himself more boyish (5). Again, there is a link between being honest with one's emotions and youthfulness. However, not every character in the novel is as 'lucky' as Chris who is given an excuse to act this way.

Even though Chris has forgotten about his present life with Kitty, she has to deal with all her traumatizing memories from the past years. Besides that, without her husband's support she has to carry a heavy burden by herself now. Kitty grieves for the husband she has lost, since she does not recognize Chris in his behaviour, while Chris does not even remember who she is. Even though their marriage might not have originated with love and desire, they did share a household together and Kitty has lost the sense of stability thereof. In the end of the novel, Jenny suddenly recognizes the loss in Kitty:

Now, why did Kitty, who was the falsest thing on earth, who was in tune with every kind of falsity, by merely suffering somehow remind us of reality? Why did her tears reveal to me what I had learned long ago, but had forgotten in my frenzied love, that there is a draught that we must drink or not be fully human? I knew that one must know the truth. (West 136)

Jenny refers to Kitty here as being false, which might also refer to herself and her own guilt of how she used to view Margaret—being a lower class than they were. Moreover, Jenny considers Kitty's wish for her husband to be cured as a false thing, since this would mean that Chris recognizes and shares the burden of the trauma that they have experienced as a couple. However, Kitty might also portray herself as being emotionless because this is ladylike behaviour whereas actually she has a lot on her plate as well. West made sure that there is no such thing as a happy ending in *The Return of the Soldier*, as it breaks a man's hope of a loving relationship. Kitty and Jenny reject Chris's ability to remain as a man in the illusion of a sentimental romance, since it is based on what has been in the past. Rather, Chris has to return to a state in which he is distant and unhappy and can be sent back to the Front.

Even though the women see that Chris is content with his memory loss, they decide together that Chris must be returned to his true self, to unhappiness, and therefore eventually to fighting for the war. For Kitty and Jenny, this decision could originate from fear of the unknown and the loss of the stability of their class. Whereas Margaret's decision could be grounded in her fear for Chris's feelings, whether these are still true in the present and not just because he is confused with the past. When Chris is brought out of his amnesia, he no longer looks for Margaret and it seems as if she becomes one with the shadows. When comparing this novel's ending to that of *A Room with a View*, it is way more pessimistic about the strength of deep love. Lucy is able to get together with George in the end, but unfortunately for Chris and Margaret, they do not share the same fate. Moreover, the way Lucy felt stuck and confined with the company of Cecil, it seems like Chris shares the same feelings for Kitty. Besides that, there is also a similar pattern in the characters and what they represent. On the one hand, Cecil and Kitty represent either a room without a view, or the inside of a house. On the other hand, George and Margaret represent natural settings such as flower fields and

gardens. But in the end, unfortunately for Chris, only Lucy is able to get together with her love and experience this relationship of freedom.

### Chapter 3. The Great Dreamer: Chasing Past Desires and Loves in *The Great Gatsby*

Fitzgerald was not from a wealthy family, as he often mentioned in interviews. In one interview, Fitzgerald specifically mentioned the time when his father lost his job: “that morning he had gone out a comparatively young man, a man full of strength, full of confidence. He came home that evening, an old man, a completely broken man. He had lost his essential drive, his immaculateness of purpose. He was a failure the rest of his days” (Brucoli et al. 122–123). Because of this, Fitzgerald started to hate the capitalist culture of America. This influenced his writing, and especially when reading *The Great Gatsby*, the reader can sense a certain disdain towards the materialistic society which sees someone’s wealth as their worth. The characters tell the reader that they struggle with finding their own worth despite their reputations or wealth.

Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* invites the reader into Gatsby’s life through the narration of Nick. When comparing the three novels, Jay Gatsby is the most captivated character in relation to holding onto desires from the past. The novels all have a character that symbolizes something that the protagonist wants but is not able to achieve. In *A Room with a View*, Lucy does not have a father figure which suggests that she seeks these characteristics in George. Moreover, she feels stuck in the present and wants to escape that by travelling or thinking back to Italy. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris seeks to go back to a time before he lost a child and had to fight in the war. He is longing to go back to the time which he transformed in his mind and therefore he only remembers the peaceful memories. This chapter will pay close attention to Gatsby’s desire in *The Great Gatsby*, and how his love for Daisy and the desire to relive his past constructs the text.

## I. Daisy as the Object of Desire

Jay Gatsby's object of desire, Daisy, is the key reason for Gatsby's self-destructive behaviour, since this desire is not only for the woman herself but also for what she stands for: that is, his American dream. Throughout the novel, the reader experiences Daisy through the language Nick uses to describe her, and through how Gatsby talks about her. Their descriptions usually relate to the way she presents herself, which is connected to her status and class. This suggests that the men do not see her for the person she is but as a personification of wealth and the goal of Gatsby's dream. Because of this, Gatsby is fixated on his past and the memories he has of Daisy. However, these memories are influenced by Gatsby's deeper desires and fears, and therefore it is questionable whether the two have actually shared true love. Moreover, when Daisy is asked about Gatsby for the first time after years she responds: "'Gatsby?' demanded Daisy. 'What Gatsby?'" (Fitzgerald 16). This passage can suggest two things: either Daisy only remembers Gatsby as 'Gatz' and is startled at hearing a similar name, especially since her Gatz was not a millionaire. The other option is that their shared moments were not as important to her as they are to him. The latter could be confirmed by the ending of the novel when Daisy does not show up even though Gatsby and she were planning to run away together. Even more heartbreakingly, Daisy shows little emotion when Gatsby is killed and does not attend his funeral—resembling in this neglect all the other people who enjoyed his parties but never seemed to care to visit. This ending shows how easy it is for society to fake their truthfulness in love and affection. It appears that even though Gatsby's life was based on illusions, it was also filled with lies and exploitation from the people around him. Except for Nick, the people that associated with Gatsby only did so to earn something out of it for themselves. Especially Daisy, who forgot about Gatsby until he climbed the social ladder and became 'worthy' of her attention. However, another possibility is that Daisy is scared for going against convention. She might have repressed her feelings and memories of Gatz, since

this love would not have been accepted by her parents. Just like in *A Room with a View*, the reader is exposed to a woman who dared to express her feelings when she was adolescent, but this courage seems to slowly fade away during adulthood. *The Great Gatsby* is another novel that concerns the fear of deep emotional connections which are corrupted by society and therefore the characters seek something from their adolescence.

When the reader arrives to the middle of the novel, there is a clear change in Gatsby's calm attitude. When addressing Tom, Gatsby cries: “[s]he never loved you, do you hear?” [...]. ‘She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me’ (Fitzgerald 123). His normally cold and calm demeanor changes in this moment of the novel, and this loss of ‘cool’ indicates the start of his breakdown. Moreover, Tom no longer considers Gatsby as a threat since he figures that Daisy will soon see the truth about Gatsby. Besides this, Nick realizes in this moment that Gatsby's love and desire for Daisy might not be for her personality, but for his goal to become ‘someone’—for in the society that this novel portrays, success seems to lie in wealth and social status. For example, when Gatsby notes that: “[Daisy's] voice is full of money” (Fitzgerald 113), Nick replies: “That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money—that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it.... High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl...” (Fitzgerald 113–114). With this notion, the reader learns that Daisy is actually a symbol of the materialistic lifestyle of the American upper class, and for the lower classes this was the ‘American dream’ they desire. However, since the characters value the wrong things in their lives, they also have a fair share of ‘undeveloped hearts.’ Because of this, the things they might yearn the most such as hope and love are impossible to understand, and therefore impossible to achieve.

The common theme in *The Great Gatsby* as well as in *The Return of the Soldier* is the fleetingness of desire. Grande notes:

These love affairs are reminiscent of a cherry tree in bloom. The flowers on the trees look intensely beautiful, then suddenly the blossoms fall. Similarly, the characters seem only to be really alive in the few years when they are young, vital, and physically attractive, before desire overcomes them. In *The Great Gatsby*, the name Daisy must also be understood in this context as having a short life span. (145–146)

As mentioned before, the core of their desire is actually in the yearning for one's goal. When it is achieved, the desire fades into nothingness or something new. Moreover, most goals that the characters have in the novel are unachievable and therefore the only thing they can do is to yearn for it. Therefore, the name Daisy is perfect for the character as she is already past the blooming period of life. This period was her adolescence since she was still considered her own person then. In the present, Daisy is Tom's wife and she is stuck in her unhappy marriage. Moreover, Daisy is transformed by society and she seems to have forgotten to value other things in life besides materialistic worth. For example, when she is in Gatsby's house she loves the silk shirts and the majestic ballroom. Also the language that is used to describe her is often materialistic. Therefore, Gatsby is the perfect character to become her new interest as he came out of the blue and has a lot of expensive objects to show her, as well as his full attention and adoration towards her. Ronald Berman states: "Daisy knows that life has many things more permanent than love" (79). To reiterate the meaning of her name, it stands for her mindset on love and the fleetingness of it. In connection to this, in *A Room with a View*, the violet field makes Lucy irresistible for George and he could not resist his desire to kiss her. Moreover, as Lucy accidentally mentions, she did not mind the kiss: "I don't think we ought to blame him very much. It makes such a difference when you see a person with beautiful things behind *him* unexpectedly" (Forster, *A Room* 144). The slip of words here when she mentions 'him' instead of 'her' shows the reader that Lucy too was intrigued by the sudden passion. However, this moment of passion did not last long since Charlotte

immediately separates them. This symbolism towards flowers and how they 'bloom' and quickly 'wither' can be connected to their desires but also to their truthfulness and hope.

## II. Themes of Truth and Hope

It is previously asserted that Daisy is Gatsby's desire because she is the personification of something his life lacks. In this subchapter, I will go into more detail about the priorities of the characters and the position of hope and truth therein. One significant difference between the previous (English) novels and *The Great Gatsby* is that Fitzgerald was an American writer, and therefore the so-called 'American dream' is prominent in his novel. However, even though the characters fixate their lives on that ideal of living—such as Gatsby, Daisy and Tom, but also Myrtle and George Wilson—it does not end the way they hoped for. Gatsby has romanticised his feelings for Daisy and when they reunite he slowly comes to the realization that she is not what he expected of her. The reason behind this disappointment is that Gatsby actually liked Daisy for what she stands for, and not for her as a person. The same goes for Daisy, who married Tom because of his wealth which later proves to be the ingredient for an unhappy marriage.

It seems that all the characters are too busy with achieving their own American dream, instead of going after their actual feelings such as love and true desires for other people. However, it is not only the American dream that the characters seek in others, but their fears have been turned into desires. For example, Gatsby fears that he will end up as a poor farmer like his parents and therefore his goal or desire is to become another person who is wealthy and in the higher circles of society. Besides that, Tom is afraid of growing up or aging and therefore he seeks youthful flings next to his marriage. Curnutt notes: "at fifty, Tom is attracted as much to Annie Lorry's age as to her beauty or social status. She is for him a veritable fountain of youth, revivifying memories of 'the warm sureties' of his own

adolescence and reintroducing him to the very terminology of young romance” (28). With this in mind, Tom is a character that refuses to accept the present and his fears by seeking memories of his adolescence. Gatsby also tries to escape his destiny by drastically changing his career path and fixates his life on Daisy.

The reason why Daisy is so important to Gatsby is because she was the first person he met—during the war—who was living a very wealthy life, and because of this, Daisy becomes the personification of such a lifestyle in his mind. When comparing Gatsby to Chris, they seem to share a similar fate in which their delusion concerning a possible unconditional love is crushed before their eyes. For example, when Gatsby reunites with Daisy, Nick asserts:

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 very near to her, almost touching her. It seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one. (Fitzgerald 89–90)

This shows that Gatsby’s love for Daisy is stuck in the past, and he mistakes his memories of their time together with the idea of unconditional love between the two of them. Moreover, the use of the word enchanted here indicates Gatsby’s approach to his desires and goals, as they were mainly based on illusions.

The First World War also plays an important part when discussing the hope of the characters in *The Great Gatsby*. The society and culture of New York introduces the reader to a certain desperate longing for gaiety after the terrifying years of the war. Beidler notes:

In Fitzgerald’s novel, the two primary figures are the titular hero, Jay Gatsby, a highly decorated hero, as it turns out, of combat with the American Expeditionary Force in France, but also in considerable degree, Nick Carraway, the first-person narrator who

begins with substantial comment on his own war experience and its effects on his subsequent understandings of belief and value. And as with such characters, one shortly discovers, so with their worlds, we feel the death culture of the war continuing throughout the ensuing decade to spill over into somber public atmospherics and grim monumentalism. For both nations, in fact, this was a matter of recent, postwar memory. (4)

The similarities between Gatsby and Chris increase when considering the condition of ‘shell shock.’ Gatsby is still haunted by his memories of the war, even though he does not have amnesia, he does fall back to his lover from the past. The war also influenced Nick, who frequently reveals similar symptoms as Gatsby, such as “a pronounced sense of emotional detachment, a chronic reserve of solitariness, a tendency to live in memory. They are both figures whose eyes have looked out on the World War I spectacle of mass death” (Beidler 6). *The Great Gatsby* portrays traumatized people who are affected by the war. In order to escape their nightmares, they live in an illusion full of erotic partygoing, and fast vehicles.

Just like in the other two novels, the characters try to evade painful memories or feelings. Because of this, the characters in this novel are unable to commit to truthful and deeply emotional connections with others. Therefore, the theme of the American dream is also connected to the war. This goal has become contaminated with the pursuit of success and wealth, which the characters mistake for happiness and freedom. However, Gatsby’s American dream is rooted in repeating the past, and therefore it is unachievable. Besides that, Nick is a very restless character who has difficulty with discovering reality behind appearances “it made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me” (Fitzgerald 22). Therefore, even though the veterans want to forget their traumatizing experiences by conforming to the fast life, Fitzgerald provides many hints that the society is still struggling with their traumas.

Gatsby is truly a mysterious character and through the eyes of Nick—as the narrator of the novel—the reader learns few details about the protagonist. Moreover, it is debatable whether the stories that Nick hears concerning Gatsby are the truth or whether they are made up. One thing that is for certain is that Gatsby desires to be(come) someone he is not. Again, in this novel, the social class structure plays an important role in Gatsby’s development, as it is suggested that he was born in a poor farmer’s household:

His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people—his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself [...]. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (Fitzgerald 94)

Therefore, Gatsby should be considered a ‘social climber,’ whose motivation has been rather romantic and dreamy, instead of financial gain. Gatsby feels like he needs to have an interesting story in order to be ‘worthy’ of Daisy’s love. Moreover, Nick’s narration tells the reader clearly about Gatsby’s goal: “[h]e 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” (Fitzgerald 105). With these insights, Nick provides the reader with a—subjective—psychoanalytical account of Gatsby’s character.

Just like Jenny, Nick acts as a prejudiced narrator whose words should be considered by the readers themselves. However, this type of narration creates a realistic insight to the events since Nick is sometimes in the dark about certain aspects of Gatsby’s life, and therefore so is the reader. Grande adds:

*The Great Gatsby* is narrated by a character with limited access to the other characters. By making Nick Carraway the storyteller, Fitzgerald established the needed distance, especially between himself as the author and the protagonist. Nick dreams of absolute

knowledge, but he is more and more inclined to see things from Gatsby's point of view. (135)

Whereas Jenny seemed to take over other people's opinions, Nick is a strong character that is not easily swayed by the people around him.

As mentioned before, the desires of the characters are for objects or feelings that they lacked in their life growing up. For example, Gatsby grew up without the luxury of money, which is an important characteristic of Daisy's personality. This is noteworthy, as the reader experiences the same kind of missing desire in *A Room with a View*; Lucy has no father figure and George has no mother figure. Therefore, they seek in each other that missing part of their childhood or adolescence that they desire for; a certain comforting figure in their lives.

Besides that, Lucy admires the freedom of the mind and lifestyle that George has which is similar to that of the Italian culture. As for *The Return of the Soldier*, the reader learns about Chris—a 'broken' soldier—who is in search for a warm-hearted and caring female character in his life, Margaret, who is also linked to loving memories of the past. However, whereas Chris had to be shaken back to reality, Gatsby still lives in the fantasy of "repeating the past." Nick admires Gatsby's determination and perhaps that is the reason why Nick does not stop him in his pursuit.

### III. The Pretenders: Losing Themselves and Others in their Destructive Desires

Up until this point, the novels have shown that holding on to your past life and desires does not end happily most of the time. A key reason for this seems to be that the character's desires are not only yearning for the past, but also running away from their truths. For example, in *A Room with a View*, Cecil portrays himself as if he desires to marry Lucy, but he actually tries to repress his sincere identity. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Chris holds onto his past love for Margaret but it was all an illusion. In fact, he had already grown up and married another

woman. Since Margaret welcomed the confused man's love with open arms—even though she was already married—suggests that she was not happy with her marriage, indicating that both characters perhaps would have been happier if in the end Chris had not been cured. Considering this, their desires for each other must have hurt the feelings of their present partners who are so easily replaced. In *The Great Gatsby*, the character's desires also become destructive. Grande asserts that Gatsby's character is:

The one who sacrifices others in order to fulfil his dreams and the one who himself becomes the sacrificed victim, cast upon an altarpiece built by the superrich, to preserve their class and prevent anybody who threatens to destroy their unquenched desire for more wealth and success. (142)

The desires in *The Great Gatsby* are so strong, that they destroy not only the main characters but also the other people around them. These characters all yearn for love, success, and acceptance which grows and matures during the novel. However, since they are not truthful to themselves, they end up getting hurt. For example, Myrtle is the victim of the superrich characters, who wanted to forget about their problems by getting a kick out of fast vehicles. Because of this, the novel is aware of the unhealthy and especially unstable mentality of the characters. Moreover, it shows how the characters avoid confronting topics such as death as the reader learns that most did not attend Myrtle's funeral, as well as Gatsby's. This comes back to the shock and trauma that the characters still have from the war.

The tragedy of *The Great Gatsby*—as well as the other two novels—is in the realization of the characters that their love interests are not actually what they really need. The characters have wrong motives to go after the other person since they are the personifications of certain unhealthy needs. Gatsby's life tells the reader that he grew up in poverty and therefore he wanted to imitate Daisy's luxurious lifestyle. For example, in *A Room with a View*, Cecil desires to cover the fact that he is romantically interested in men. Because of the

wrong motivation, the men end up chasing romantic relationships with people they do not actually share a deep connection with. Despite the other novels, Forster took a different, more optimistic approach to the development of the relationship between George and Lucy by saying that the two characters needed a push in the back by others in order to surrender to their true desires. However, it seems that in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Return of the Soldier*, the characters do not know what their true desires are since they are too captured by illusions, trauma and escapism. For example, in the end of *The Return of the Soldier*, there is a darkness in Chris that returns after he is cured. This darkness is his unresolved trauma entwined with his sorrow for not being able to continue living in his illusion of the past. Moreover, both the relationships in *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Great Gatsby* have gone through not one but two separations, and in both cases the second time hurt the most since they were grown up and lost their hope by realizing the impossibility of their dreams and desires. There is no longer hope for the characters that one can repeat the past.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the characters look back at the past as being a better time, and they mistake those transfigured memories with sincere feelings of love and desire. While reading the novel, it is clear that, in the beginning, Gatsby honestly believes that he can relive the past. In *The Return of the Soldier*, West took a quite literal approach in which Chris forgets a part of himself—and also part of his memory—and believes Margaret is a contemporary love interest when actually that was fifteen years ago. Anne Crow argues: “In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald [...] explores man’s attempts to repeat the past. Gatsby has rewritten his past, having manipulated time once when he reinvented himself, and he dreams of doing it again” (26). Nick admires Gatsby because of his origin and how dedicated he is to change his life. However, since Gatsby is a headstrong man who fixated his life on his desire, it slowly destroys him when the realization of its impossibility seeps in. Besides, the characters in the novel show the reader that their desires are grounded in something else. It

seems that if they achieve their current desires that this is actually not the key to their happiness. Moreover, it would help the characters run away from what they truly need, which is being able to accept their true selves in the present time.

Since *The Great Gatsby* takes place in the early twentieth century, the characters would have experienced many evolutionary and challenging events. The characters must have been influenced by force of the events “both in terms of their comparatively rapid sequence and in terms of their immediate global impact, which was brought about by new technologies of warfare and communication” (Christoph Reinfandt 3). Specifically Fitzgerald’s novel focusses on this rapid lifestyle with technological objects such as telephones and cars, which are key to the story’s plot. The characters portray difficulty with their mental stability because of traumas and the inability to keep up with the time. Eventually it even builds up to murderous acts, which leaves the reader to figure out how class differences, adultery, desire, and the yearning for success could end so tragically. However, when close reading the novel, it appears that honesty is the key thing that is lacking. The characters run from their traumas and fears instead of embracing them and healing from it.

There is a similarity in Fitzgerald’s novel and Forster’s novel regarding different ways society can manage their desires and needs. The society that is portrayed in *The Great Gatsby* is full of sexual tension, and therefore no one seems morally shocked by adultery. The reader is confronted with two contrasting sides of America:

The East is the America of desire, of adventure, excitement, and freedom. Society is on the brink of great upheavals as the result of desire, although the West is still rather entrenched in its regularity and established patterns. Thus, in contrast to the East, the West represents a traditional society, where desire is kept under control. (Grande 130)

This contrast is also seen in *A Room with a View* in which the Italian culture (the East) is the opposite of the English culture (the West). In both novels, the characters try to escape from

traditional society and their restrictions, and live a life full of spontaneity and youthful desires just like they had in their adolescent pasts. However, what they are actually doing is trying to recreate the past, and therefore it is not spontaneous, but set up. Just like in *The Return of the Soldier*, there is this submission to fantasy of the characters in which they are willing to escape the truth. In the end of the novel, the reader reads from Nick's perspective: "its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams" (Fitzgerald 171). The word 'pander' explains Nick's role in the affair between Daisy and Gatsby, as Grande asserts:

Pander is derived from Pandarus, a character in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, who acts as a go-between to foster the love affair between Criseyde and Troilus. Just like Pandarus, who advises Troilus in the wooing of Criseyde, Nick enables Gatsby to fulfil his love. Pander means to gratify or indulge an immoral or distasteful desire or habit. (138)

This theme of other people that enable the love between two desiring people is also found in *A Room with a View*, in which is suggested that Charlotte actually helped Lucy and George. However, in *The Return of the Soldier* it is the opposite, in which the Kitty and Jenny decide to end the love between Chris and Margaret.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine three things. Firstly, it has considered how the three novels depict the meaning of ‘growing up.’ We have established that in *A Room with a View*, Lucy has yet to develop herself as an adult, and her trip to Florence is a major part of this development. In this novel, there was a contradiction between becoming an adult, and having to conform to society’s norms. During her stay in Italy she is exposed to passion and intimacy, which she does not forget on her return to England. Her memories of George and Italy help her realize in the end who she wants to become as an individual. In *The Return of the Soldier*, the reader learns that Chris does not want to continue his adult life with Kitty as he is under the illusion that he is his younger self again. Yet again, this novel views adulthood negatively as a zone of conventional burdens and dulling responsibilities. Finally, in *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby’s life tells the reader that he is holding onto the past. In his development, he has become an entirely different person whose life is formed by his desire to recreate the past. Moreover, the depicted love in the three novels can be read as ‘adolescent’ in nature, one which shapes itself because it blooms from repressed desires. Because of this, the concept of time proves key for the love plots. The main story of *The Great Gatsby* takes place in a condensed timespan, taking place in a New York summer in 1922. However, there are often flashbacks and dialogues about the war when Gatsby met Daisy for the first time, and this meeting initiated Gatsby’s desire. This thesis shows that in all three novels the characters tend to avoid true emotional connections as they are afraid it will only end in hurt. Therefore, it is part of growing up that the characters need to ‘sip from the cup of truth’ and embrace these fears, as repressing their true desires will only lead to undeveloped hearts and sorrow.

Secondly, this thesis analyzed how the key themes of (repressed) love and desire are represented in the novels, and especially how these connect to the characters’ memories of the

past. In *A Room with a View*, Lucy represses romantic feelings for George. The reason behind this seemed to be because of their class differences and therefore society would have been against it. However, when closely examining Lucy's character, the main reason behind this repression in fact seems to be her fear of authentic connections. She grasps the seriousness of her feelings for George and as an adolescent woman, she finds herself afraid of what she had to do with such feelings. In *The Return of the Soldier*, the painful connection to true love is also key since Chris's loss acts as the cure for his amnesia. This also suggests that the marriage between him and Kitty was not out of love, but rather because of their social status. Moreover, the love Chris felt for his son became a hurtful memory for him. It is to avoid such hurt that, the characters avoid getting attached to another person. In *The Great Gatsby*, the protagonist is obsessed with his past love because she symbolizes his American dream full of wealth and status. Fitzgerald knew from his personal life what money—or the lack thereof—could do to people. Moreover, the materialistic world of the upper class and the glamorous parties became a shelter for the traumatized veterans.

Thirdly, the thesis considered the shared pattern of the disruptive social conventions on the pursuit of love. Class differences are important in all three novels, as the love plots are about an upper class and lower class person. In *The Great Gatsby*, the desire of the protagonist is based on illusions from the past and a romantic dream of reliving those memories. Gatsby is clearly a romantic who decided to live his life based on a romantic longing for one single person. The same goes for West's protagonist, Chris, who tries to continue his life in a romanticized fantasy. Both Gatsby's and Chris's desire does not belong to the present, but it belongs to a past that is transfigured by their imagined memories. Compared to the other novels, Gatsby is the most influenced by this 'immature' romanticism as he is truly committed to relive the past. Chris can blame it on his amnesia, however it is questionable whether his desires changed after he was cured. Finally, there is George who

cannot resist his desire for Lucy even though she is engaged to another man. These three men are persistent in following their desires, but only George succeeds in finding fulfilment in this way. The key thing that these novels teach the reader is that it is best for all parties to keep things from the past in the past. For George, his love and desire for Lucy was not as much from the past as it was for Chris and Gatsby. This might be the key difference in their success, as George was still able to form his present and did not chase the past.

This thesis argued that the feelings of love and desire are vital to the novels *A Room with a View*, *The Return of the Soldier* and *The Great Gatsby*, and that the representations of love and desire in them grounds itself in the individual journey of growing up. Trotter asserts: “desire and prohibition have been created together” (190). This corresponds with the claims that were made in this thesis about the core of desire. Therefore, it is questionable whether the desire would endure when they achieved their goal. In the end, both Chris and Gatsby do not hold on to what they yearned. Lucy succeeds in forming a relationship with George, however it seems that this was not entirely her desire since she also yearned for a sense of freedom that women did not have. George represents a life of freedom and passion, which eventually became Lucy’s desire.

In conclusion, this thesis has analysed these narratives of love and desire, showing how they share the same pattern of associating present desires and love with past memories from adolescence. Even though two of the novels were tragic, and one comedic, they all share the same message. Society makes rules that hamper the individual; the present time becomes a vulnerable one, in which the person stands between past and present, fulfilment and unfulfillment, their own desires and what others want of them. Their stories act as symbolic properties wherein the reader sees the conflict between love, authenticity, and a narrow view of what it means to be a solid citizen endlessly play out.

## Works Cited

- Beidler, Philip D. "The Great Party-Crasher: Mrs Dalloway, *The Great Gatsby*, and the Cultures of World War I Remembrance." *War, Literature, and the Arts* 25.1 (2013): 1–23. Web.
- Berman, Ronald. "The Great Gatsby and the Twenties." *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Ruth Prigozy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 79–94. Web.
- Bonikowski, Wyatt. "The Return of the Soldier Brings Death Home." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 51.3. 2005. 513–535. Web.
- Brucoli et al. *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Jackson, Ms: University Press of Mississippi, 2004. Print.
- Bryan, Rachel. "The Return of the 'Spiritual Soldier': Rebecca West's Henry James." *The Henry James Review* (2018): 256–266. Web.
- Corne, Jonah. "Queer Fragments: Ruination and Sexuality in E.M. Forster." *College literature* 41.3 (2014): 27–44. Web.
- Crow, Anne. *The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald*. London: Hodder Education Group, 2016. Web.
- Curnutt, Kirk. "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Age Consciousness, and the Rise of American Youth Culture." *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Ruth Prigozy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 28–47. Web.
- Curnutt, Kirk. "Critical Reception." *The Cambridge Introduction to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 2007. 112–126. Web.
- Curr, Matthew. "Recuperating E.M. Forster's *Maurice*." *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 62.1 (2001): 53–69. Web.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Chiltern. 2018. Print.

- Forster, Edward M. *A Room with a View*. Penguin Essentials. 2011. Print.
- Forster, Edward M. *Aspects of the Novel*. Harmondsworth [etc.]: Penguin, 1962. Print.
- Echeruo, Michael J. C. "E. M. Forster and the 'Undeveloped Heart.'" *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1962, 151–155. ProQuest. Web.
- Gerber, Helmut E. "English Literature, 1880–1920: The 'Little Renaissance.'" *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, vol. 63 no. 1. 2020. 3–19. Web.
- Goldblatt, Laura. "'Can't Repeat the Past?' *Gatsby* and the American Dream at Mid Century." *Journal of American Studies* 50.1 (2016): 105–124. Web.
- Grande, Per Bjørnar. "Desire in *The Great Gatsby*." *Desire*. Michigan State University Press, 2020. 129–174. Web.
- Hotz-Davies, Ingrid. "Gender: Performing Politics in Prose? Performativity – Masculinity Feminism – Queer." *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, edited by Christoph Reinfandt, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, (2017): 82-106. Web.
- Jones, Sadie. Afterword in *The Return of the Soldier*. Virago Modern Classics (2010): 141–148. Print.
- Kavka, Misha. "Men in Shock: Masculinity, Trauma, and Psychoanalysis in Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*." *Studies in 20th Century Literature* (1998). Web.
- Reinfandt, Christoph. *Handbook of the English Novel of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Vol. 5. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc, 2017. Web.
- Roszak, Suzanne. "Social Non-Conformists in Forster's Italy: Otherness and the Enlightened English Tourist." *Ariel* 45.1 (2014): 167–194. Web.
- Scanlon, Mara. "Gender Identity and Promiscuous Identification: Reading (in) Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*." *Journal of Modern Literature* (2017): 66–83. Web.
- Trotter, David. *The Novel in History. 1895-1920*. London [etc.]: Routledge,

1993. Print.

West, Rebecca. *The Return of the Soldier*. Virago Modern Classics. 2010. Print.

West, Rebecca, and G. E. Hutchinson. "On *The Return of the Soldier*." *The Yale University Library Gazette* 57.1/2 (1982): 66–71. Web.