

ENGLISH: *THE GREAT GATSBY/BROWNING'S SONNETS*

How do both texts convey representations of love?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry 'Sonnets of the Portuguese' (1850) and Scott Fitzgerald's novel 'The Great Gatsby' convey love as a universal desire fundamental towards the attainment of genuine relationships. Despite this shared value, a comparative reading of both texts extends our understanding of the radical role of contrasting contexts in representing distinct insights into the pursuit for love, and how it is realised. Romanticist appreciation of emotional sincerity together with reformist zeal against the Industrial Revolution, strong religious ethos and repressive patriarchal strictures of Victorian society forwarded Browning to represent love as an attainable, transcendental and redemptive force, through her manipulation of traditional Petrarchan sonnet form. Conversely, Fitzgerald's engagement with experimental modernist techniques serves to nihilistically critique post-war modernity, the evaporation of decency in 1920s America through the detrimental effects of liberalism, hedonism and greed upon the development of love and genuine human relationships. Both writers living within Western societies on the cusp of social change, regard love as intrinsic to the human condition. However their transition of perspectives towards this concern is indebted to the values prevalent at the time of composition.

Enlightenment optimism based upon the power of reason and science to liberate influenced Browning to represent the pursuit for love as a redemptive force against the restrictive barriers of patriarchal Victorian society. Through this, her 'Sonnets of the Portuguese' depicts revolutionary notions of femininity through revaluating courtly love by intellectualising and historicising it. The fact that her context offers creativity despite its limitations shows her ability to break free from the constrictions of gender by challenging the form of the Italian Petrarchan sonnet that reinforces notions of the woman as an active propagator of love, not the passive subject or object. Her poetry evocatively recalls the deep recess of her soul: "me, myself"; cementing a self-affirming persona which rebelliously expresses feminine desire and represents love as a sign of resistance against the patriarchal and rigid behaviours of courtly love. She shows that the pursuit of love is both disturbing and exciting and captures the unsettling experience of a woman who had seen her life as unchanging. Humanist sentiments of the evolving dynamic state through incongruous association: "sweet, sad years, melancholy years" communicates the proximity of joy and sadness in romantic love through a process of rejuvenation. Her marriage with poet Robert Browning enabled her to transfer the notion that lovers are equal individuals in generating the synergy of passion and discovery that celebrates consummated love. Imagery including 'face to face' and 'two souls stand together erect and strong' portrays emotions contemplative of the equal treatment of lovers. Here she also challenges the valuing of platonic love that underpins renaissance representations of courtly love by foregrounding the fluidity of body and soul: "lengthening wings breaking into fire" and blatantly communicate the fulfilment achieved through consummated love. Here she embodies the same notions of democracy which characterised the drive towards individual liberty found in rising reform movement of the 19th C England, such as factory reform, women's rights and the anti-slavery movement, which led to her certainty in the pursuit of love as a liberating force against her repressive society. This representation of love contrasts with Fitzgerald's critique of the socially liberated and homogenized post W11 America which led to his uncertainty towards the pursuit of love.

Like Browning, Fitzgerald also nobilises the pursuit for love, but in alignment with the twentieth century denunciation of emotion as sentimentality and the drive for wealth and glamour, he acknowledges that in 1926 romantic ideals of love AS clichéd and naïve. However his novel, impelled by Modernist humanism (similar to Romantic humanism of Browning's time), the erosion of traditional values (such as courtly love in the Victorian Age); also represents genuine regret for its effect upon the loss of romantic idealism. Through the characterisation of Jay Gatsby he communicates that nostalgia for romantic idealism is rendered adverse in the Jazz Age as Gatsby's "appalling sentimentality" and nostalgia for values of the past: "Can't repeat the past? Why of course you can!" is incompatible with the superficial values of the Jazz Age. Through this Fitzgerald points

out that the American dream of hard work is like an agrarian myth, as it cannot be applied to life in the city. Gatsby himself is ironically modelled upon mass culture – glamorous ideas that are themselves inauthentic: “Jay Gatsby—a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, a universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain”. Here Gatsby has worked hard to acquire wealth solely to earn Daisy’s compassion, demonstrating his failure to realise the naïve idealism of his quest when he doesn’t understand why she fails to return his sentiment. This communicates Fitzgerald’s mistrust for emotion as sentimentality. His impossible ideals are contrasted with the erosion of compassion of New York high society in order to critique the spurious atmosphere of modernity and its effect in corroding the capacity for individuals to meaningfully connect with one another. The use of metonymy: “Her voice is full of money” demonstrates Daisy’s allure is shallow and forwards her to choose her decadent lifestyle with Tom over Gatsby. This shows how economic practices dehumanize and manipulate people into treating one another as commodities. Clearly then, the green light functions as symbol of Gatsby’s pursuit of an illusory dream but also represents his determination in achieving his pursuit for love. Through this Fitzgerald represents a sense of nostalgia for through nobleising Gatsby’s strength in pursuing his own ideal of love and intense desire to recapture a moments of innocence from the past. Thus Fitzgerald’s first hand experiences with the shifting climate of post WW1 America—mass consumerism, Ford assembly line and the drive for wealth and glamour, nobilises the struggle for the pursuit of love. Yet he raises awareness that this type of romantic idealism (albeit prevalent in Browning’s 19th C context) is impractically incompatible with his spiritually impoverished society. In contrast with the emotionally stagnant 1920s America, the Romanticist premium upon the egotistical sublime, religious ethos and emotional sincerity in life and literature, enriched Browning’s to use poetry to capture her feelings of love as an attainable force.

As opposed to the 20th C denunciation of sincerity as sentimentality; she doesn’t want to write tritely as other poets and aims to exude sincerity when expressing her love: “love me also in the silence of thy soul”, “our deep, dear silence”. Through this voice, Browning brings attention to the intensity of her feelings through valuing silence over speech. She also reverts the ornate form of traditional Petrarchan sonnets which did not prioritise the spontaneous outflow of feeling through the high modality of muscular and angular language such as the prosaic word “flung” and “at a curved point”. This mockery of textual form and its inability to communicate the full extent of her love was also stimulated by Protestant Christianity’s criticism upon Catholicism’s excessive inclusion of beauty and ritual in practices and lack of deep feeling. Through a tone of gentle protest and reproach in the pun on: “finding words enough” she thematically explains that she does not want to put her love into words, explains that it isn’t enough and admits her previous mistake in believing it does. Thus through setting up a precedent form death to love, in the style of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, she pours her heart out onto the page through poetry and expresses how attaining love has endowed meaning into her life and given her life back. Here she expresses how individuals seek love and are equally fulfilled by it. Thus poetry as a means to an end is concurrent with Gatsby’s wealth as a bridge towards expressing his love for Daisy, but unlike Gatsby, Browning attains it.

Fitzgerald foregrounds the vanity, materialism and liberalism of the Roaring 20s by appraisal in order to viscerally convey its ambiguity, the corrosion of profound emotion and hence individuals’ capacity to realise deep feelings of love. In the same way that Browning draws upon Wordsworth, he draws upon Modernist writers TS Elliot and Joseph Conrad to show how individuals seek love but however, are not equally fulfilled by it. The decision to eschew traditional realist narration through employing Nick Carraway as a psychologically recognisable yet unreliable narrator from the Midwest allows him to explore the superficial values of New York high society through the experiences of a man who is both exhilarated and appalled by the racy lifestyle he encounters: “I was simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life. “ Awareness of Nick’s caution, indecision and derision enables readers to doubt the veracity of his judgements and in doing so experience the moral incongruity of the era steeped in the economic decline of the Wall Street Crash and the Ponzi Scheme where the idea of love has transpired in exchange for ‘fast cars’ and ‘fast money’. Nick’s emotional distance throughout the trope of his journey lets Fitzgerald to foreground the emotional emptiness of post WW11 America through his impassive observations of

Myrtle and Gatsby's deaths: "leaves revolved it slowly...a thin red circle in the water" and "left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart underneath." This narration also makes use of parallel characterisation wherein the only true lovers-Myrtle and Gatsby – are unable to survive in such a superficial society. Myrtle relies on the fantasy of a man above her class to rescue her from the drudgery of existence and Gatsby is plagued in obsessive love beyond himself.

5) Thus the inevitable deaths of these two characters permit Fitzgerald to decry an era devoid of sincerity where love's attainability is rendered adverse by the cynical treatment of the expression of emotion and love's inability to transcend the barriers of an illusory dream.

All in all her love for her husband, revolutionary zeal and high valuing of spirituality and sincerity dominant in position her to represent love as an attainable force capable of empowering herself as a Victorian woman and fulfilling equality in lovers. This contrasts with Fitzgerald's satirical stance on the demise of spirituality in the Jazz Age and its effect on the inability of individuals to achieve genuine relationships and realise the benefits of love. Thus differing concerns in their respective contexts are critical factors which have enhanced their contrasting representations of love.