Such a story would be essentially tragic, by which Fitzgerald meant that such a character would undo himself, and such a novel would end on a "dying fall," by which he in turn meant that a sense of sadness and melancholy came about when such intensity was deflected by the opposing forces of life. This new kind of novel would work in great part by association and suggestion; the major character would be more mysterious than fully blown and the reader would be expected to fill in the narrative gaps that the author intentionally left in the text. But Fitzgerald also believed that he had to know the material that he was leaving out as well as the material that he was developing, that the empty spaces of a text spoke as loudly as those that were filled, so long as an author had clearly in mind the narrative meaning he was consciously omitting.

With this general plan in mind Fitzgerald began to formulate the narrative design of *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby would, of course, be in the center of the novel. Gatsby would in effect be the product of his own imagination, a creature who wanted to live with the greatest intensity of romantic experience. In his early fiction Fitzgerald had conceptualized an idea of self based on the principles of "personage" versus "personality." By *personage* he meant a sense of an essential self that made one different from others and gave total focus to one's purpose and sense of meaning in life. By *personality* he meant a sense of an accidental self that was composed of the by-products of personage: the manner in which one spoke, the way one carried oneself while walking or dancing, the way one dressed. Fitzgerald felt that only the personage lived life with intensity. The personage became his own god, had a sense of the vast potentiality of life.

When one lost that sense of life or promise—which Fitzgerald characteristically predicated on youth—then life lost its sense of wonder, its splendor, its romantic promise. To desire was, ironically, more important than to have. The man who had great wealth (Tom Buchanan) or the man who was beaten by life (George Wilson) lacked the intensity of experience of a Gatsby who was a "son of God" and who "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself," as the novel tells us. To lose this romantic conception of self is to move from a kind of heaven of the mind to a hell, which in the novel is embodied by the valley of ashes and incarnated by George Wilson its custodian, who, appropriately, becomes the agent of Gatsby's death when Gatsby himself loses his sense of wonder and romantic readiness, at which moment Gatsby's world becomes "material without being real" and a rose becomes "grotesque."