The Different Faces of Narcissism:
A Psychoanalytic Reading of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Narcissismens Olika Ansikten:
En Psykoanalytisk Läsning av *Den Store Gatsby* och *Dorian Grays Porträtt*

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to perform a comparative psychoanalytic reading of *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) in terms of the titular characters’ narcissistic behavior. My claim is that Jay Gatsby and Dorian Gray can be seen as different depictions of narcissism. Literary critics in previous research characterized Gatsby and Gray as narcissists, but, there has not been a comparison between the two with focus on their narcissism. Gatsby and Gray display crucial differences which suggests that they portray narcissism in different ways. Theodore Millon identified four subtypes of the original narcissistic personality in order to better identify different types of narcissists. My aim is to use his subtypes to identify, and provide the causes and effects of Gatsby’s and Gray’s particular narcissistic behavior. My analysis indicates that Gatsby can be seen as a fictional illustration of the unprincipled and compensatory narcissist while Gray can be viewed as a fictional characterization of the amorous narcissist.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby, The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Jay Gatsby, Dorian Gray, Narcissism, Psychoanalytic literary criticism.
Introduction

The titular characters from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) have much in common. To begin with, Jay Gatsby and Dorian Gray are both fixated on their idea of perfection. Gatsby desires to attain the perfect life while Gray wishes to hold on to his perfect beauty regardless of the price. The protagonists’ goals result in their lives being filled with corruption, crime and tragedy. Gatsby and Gray have also in separate research been characterized as narcissists, but, there has not been a comparison between the two with focus on their narcissistic behavior. My claim is that the titular characters have crucial differences in their behavior which suggests that they portray narcissism differently. The purpose of this essay is to carry out a comparative reading of the two novels using psychoanalytic literary criticism and illustrate that Gatsby and Gray can be seen as two different depictions of narcissism.

The psychoanalytical concept of narcissism has a clear connection to literature because it comes from the myth of Narcissus found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.). The myth is about a beautiful youth named Narcissus who has many admirers and is found irresistible by both sexes. But, due to his pride, Narcissus is aloof and indifferent towards his admirers and keeps rejecting them until one rejected admirer asks the god of vengeance to cast a curse on him as punishment. The curse results in Narcissus falling in love with his own reflection upon seeing himself in a river. As a result, he pines away at his own image until he eventually dies and transforms into the flower named Narcissus. Jeffrey Berman states in *Narcissism and The Novel* that the myth not only enacts the self-centered and cold love which proves to be destructive and confining, but also includes “essential oppositions of human existence: presence/absence, subject/object and reality/illusion” (11)

The Narcissus theme has since Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* been chronicled in poetry, drama and fiction by literary historians (Berman 11). For example, “The major English versions of the Narcissus legend” up to the year 1680 can be found in Douglas Bush’s *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry* (1932), and Louise Vinge’s *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature Up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (1967) features detailed analysis of the many different literary versions of the myth (Berman 11).

According to Berman one can analyze narcissism in literature on four different levels: fictional character, text, author and reader (87). With that in mind, the focus of this essay will be on the fictional characters Jay Gatsby and Dorian Gray. Berman writes that fictional characters just like real people reveal essential narcissistic features and it is based on these features that one can analyze the
character’s narcissism (84). The use of psychoanalysis on literary characters for the purpose of understanding their behavior has been questioned by some critics due to them not being real human beings. However, in *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson writes in response to such critics that, first of all, when psychoanalyzing literary characters, nobody is implying that they are real people but that they “Represent the psychological experience of human beings in general” (35). She also argues that if one can “analyze them from a feminist, Marxist or African American critical perspective or from the perspective of any critical theory that analyzes literary representations as illustrations of real-life issues,” then it is no less valid to use psychoanalysis (35).

Theodore Millon identified four subtypes of the prototype narcissistic personality in the first edition of his book *Personality Disorders in Modern Life* (1981): the compensatory, the elitist, the amorous and the unprincipled narcissist. Main characteristics of prototype narcissism are grandiosity, entitlement, arrogance, exploitation, need of admiration and lack of empathy (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 346). These subtypes were created by Millon in order to better identify different types of narcissists, since few people “in real life exist as the incarnation of an abstract psychological ideal” (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 337). My aim is to use Millon’s subtypes to illustrate the difference between Gatsby’s and Gray’s narcissism. My analysis indicates that Jay Gatsby can be viewed as a fictional illustration of the unprincipled and compensatory narcissist while Dorian Gray can be seen as a fictional characterization of the amorous narcissist.

Millon’s category of elitist narcissism will not be used in this essay because this type “amplifies an already inflated self-image” as opposed to negating feelings of inadequacy and inferiority (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339). Millon states that this type of narcissism stems from a fear of “being ordinary” (*Personality Disorders* 339). In my analysis, I argue that Gatsby’s and Gray’s narcissism can be seen as a result of self-esteem issues, and that excludes the elitist narcissism. Before moving on to the analysis, I am going to provide a description of the three subtypes used in this essay.

Millon writes that unprincipled narcissists have the self-confident behavior of the narcissist in combination with the deviant behavior of “antisocial personality patterns” (337). A large amount of these narcissists become successful by exploiting the limits of law to the point of illegality; they are swindlers and scammers who take advantage of others for personal gain (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 337). While many narcissists have a normal conscience these individuals have very few inner moral prohibitions, and are very skilled in the ways of social influence (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 337). Millon describes this type of narcissist as being proficient in using their charm and suave manners to
deceive others. They go well past being just disloyal or exploitative, and show an alarming disregard for the well-being of others (409-10). Furthermore, this type of narcissist may show a reckless willingness to put themselves in harm’s way and fearlessness in the face of threats and punishment. Moreover, unprincipled narcissists take great pleasure in outsmarting or swindling others after having gained their trust, and they reason that if someone can be deceived then they deserve to be used (Millon, *Disorders of Personality* 409-10). Additionally, these narcissists are haughty to the truth and if confronted they are likely to show justified innocence and deny their behavior by faking politeness or simply put on an arrogant attitude and condemn the accuser for not having found out sooner (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 337).

According to Millon, compensatory narcissists desire to cancel out deep feelings of inferiority and a lack of self-esteem by creating illusions of being superior, noteworthy, held in great respect and extraordinary (411). Essentially, these narcissists seek to atone or compensate for early life hardship, and gain self-worth from self-enhancements (Millon, *Disorders of* 411). The lives of compensatory narcissists turn as a result into a pursuit to achieve aspirations of high status, prestige and recognition (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 338). Furthermore, these narcissists seemingly need the recognition of others to realize their aspirations for prestige (Millon, *Disorders of* 411). They may for example tire people with long stories of all their achievements and successes, as well as showing them various awards (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339). Millon states that compensatory narcissists are vulnerable to critical judgment and are therefore highly aware of what people may think of them. Criticism will cause them to feel offended, but they will behave as if nothing happened with an arrogant and grandiose attitude which serves to mask their feelings of inferiority (Millon, *Disorders of* 412). Moreover, they will often pursue a leading role in an imaginary reality unrelated to the real world, and thus come across as delusional (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339). Furthermore, compensatory narcissists view themselves as their own god, and essentially worship themselves. (Millon, *Disorders of* 412). Additionally, when endangered by reality they will simply defend themselves by becoming dismissive and show arrogance until the threat disengages (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339).

On the other hand, the main characteristic of amorous narcissists is a need to build up their self-esteem through sexual exploits (Millon, *Disorders of* 410). They are very skillful in charming and attracting the emotionally naive and needy while fulfilling their hedonistic desires and sexual appetites as they see fit (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339). Although this type of narcissist will imply to be looking for an exclusive relationship, they do not have a preference for legitimate intimacy and instead
seduce several potential conquests at the same time (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339). Millon states that these narcissists augment their sense of narcissistic power with sexual conquests, and after having won others over they swiftly write off their lovers and continue their game elsewhere (*Personality Disorders* 339). The sexual exploits of amorous narcissists are short-lived, and last mostly one afternoon to only a few weeks. They normally view their partners as a temporary warm body that they can exploit before boredom overtakes them. Furthermore, amorous narcissists leave behind them a series of scandalous acts such as swindling, sexual abundance, pathological lying and fraud (Millon, *Disorders of* 411). Moreover, criticism or confrontations are not likely to change their ways as they will simply dismiss these as a result of jealousy by inferior people (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339). Amorous narcissists will also in most cases display a considerable body narcissism, and care a great deal about their appearance and clothes (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 339).

Jay Gatsby

Jay Gatsby’s main narcissistic themes are grandiosity and omnipotence, and both derive from feelings of shame and inferiority. Campbell and Foster write that the narcissistic self can be described as a self-regulatory system, where a group of traits work to protect the self-esteem and pride (120). Gatsby’s narcissism can be seen as a result of self-esteem issues stemming from his unhappy childhood. There are several details that suggest Gatsby is ashamed and unhappy with growing up in a lower class family. We learn that Gatsby was born James Gatz to unsuccessful farmers in North Dakota, and his imagination could not accept them as his parents because of their lower class status (Fitzgerald 75). Furthermore, Gatsby runs away from his home, changes his name, and lies about his life and family history (Fitzgerald 74, 75, 133, 70). Gatsby is also the victim of child abuse which is mentioned by his father to Nick “He told me I et like a hog once, and I beat him for it” (Fitzgerald 134). According to Beverly Engel, the feeling of shame can do tremendous damage to a person’s self-esteem, and cause feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. Furthermore, survivors of child abuse can become what is called “shame-bound”, which means that shame becomes a leading feature in their personality (Engel, n. p).

Based on these details, one could argue that the combination of Gatsby’s perceived shameful lower-class family and abuse has had a negative effect on his self-esteem. Therefore, Gatsby’s fantasies of grandiosity and omnipotence can be viewed as a form of protection for his low self-esteem. In order to compensate for any kind of shortcomings and self-hate, narcissists create with the help of their
imagination an “idealized image” of themselves upon which they bestow great powers and exaggerated abilities (Paris 22). Gatsby’s idealized self-image is in the form of believing that he is a Son of god:

The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. 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 75)

Gatsby’s grandiose and omnipotent beliefs are similar to the compensatory narcissist, who seeks to eliminate feelings of low self-esteem and inferiority by creating fantasies of superiority and being extraordinary.

Giles Mitchell argues that as a result of his omnipotent beliefs, Gatsby “believes he can control time” (388). Gatsby’s omnipotent fantasies of time control become increasingly obvious when it is clear that he wants to go back to Louisville with Daisy Buchanan “and be married from her house — just as if it were five years ago” (Fitzgerald 84). Gatsby essentially seeks to reverse time and then repeat it according to his imagination as if the five years never happened at all: “He talked a lot about the past . . . if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly” (Fitzgerald 84). Gatsby’s plan is irrational, and similar thoughts are expressed by Ted Billy (1985) who states that Gatsby’s "attempt to alter the passage of time" is a kind of "madness and despair" (qtd in Mitchell 393). When Gatsby’s plan is questioned by Nick, who says “You can’t repeat the past,” to which Gatsby responds defiantly, “Can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!” (Fitzgerald 84). Gatsby’s adamant belief in his plan to repeat the past indicates that his fantasies of omnipotence have gotten the better of him and he is coming across as delusional, similar to the compensatory narcissist who lives in an imaginary reality.

Another instance when Gatsby’s delusion is apparent is during the Plaza scene, where he apparently believes that he has been in a relationship with Daisy despite not seeing her for close to five years:
‘I told you what’s been going on,’ said Gatsby. ‘Going on for five years — and you didn’t know.’ Tom turned to Daisy sharply. ‘You’ve been seeing this fellow for five years?’ ‘Not seeing,’ said Gatsby. ‘No, we couldn’t meet. But both of us loved each other all that time, old sport, and you didn’t know. I used to laugh sometimes . . . to think that you didn’t know’. (Fitzgerald 100)

Even though he has not seen or heard from Daisy for five years in addition to her marrying another man, Gatsby seems to believe some kind of relationship has been going on for five years. Gatsby has in essence created an imaginary relationship in his mind in order to be able to cope with the truth of reality, which is that he lost Daisy to Tom Buchanan.

Additionally, Gatsby reduces Daisy’s marriage to Tom to a mere mistake in order to further shield himself from the truth “‘She never loved you, do you hear?’ he cried. ‘She only married you because I was poor and she was tired of waiting for me. It was a terrible mistake, but in her heart she never loved any one except me!’” (Fitzgerald 100). Gatsby’s behavior is much alike the compensatory narcissists who in order to protect their self-esteem have to create various illusions in order to deny failure.

Millon states that narcissists believe they should live a perfect and superior existence (Personality Disorders 344). Perfection is viewed as either all or nothing and no flaws can be tolerated (Millon, Personality Disorders 345). Gatsby therefore attempts to repress the imperfect poverty-stricken James Gatz by changing his name and creating a new life at age seventeen (Fitzgerald 74). Similar thoughts are expressed by Tyson who writes that Gatsby’s fabricated life is more than just a scheme to pass himself off as a member of the upper class, it is also a form of denial and defense to help him repress the memory of his real past (47).

Furthermore, Gatsby attempts to create illusions of a perfect life by lying. According to Millon, narcissists edit their personal history which includes augmenting objective successes and minimizing or transforming failures in an effort to protect their vulnerable self-esteem (Personality Disorders 356). Gatsby frequently lies throughout the story and the biggest lie is his life story. As he tells Nick Carraway he is “the son of some wealthy people in the middle west – all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition” (Fitzgerald 70). Gatsby’s fabricated life story is addressed by David L. Minter, who states that his history is almost entirely invented (84). Indeed, the history Gatsby has invented for
himself is of an Oxford educated man from the world of old money. Gatsby is in essence attempting to change his illegally amassed new money into prestigious old money. With this in mind, Gatsby displays the compensatory narcissistic trait of creating illusions of being superior and prestigious.

Moreover, after claiming that his parents died he feels the need to tell Nick how he lived like “a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe — collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little” (Fitzgerald 48). Gatsby also shows Nick a war medal for good measure because he does not want him to think that he is “just some nobody” (Fitzgerald 49). Gatsby’s behavior again allows me to draw a parallel to the compensatory narcissist who out of deep feelings of inferiority seeks to create illusions of being successful and insists on telling others all of their achievements.

Additional displays of Gatsby attempting to remove imperfections from his life are apparent upon examining Gatsby’s central goal in the novel, which is to marry Daisy. Gatsby cannot accept that he once lost Daisy to Tom, and insists therefore “that she should go to Tom and say: ‘I never loved you’” (Fitzgerald 83). Losing Daisy to Tom is a blow to Gatsby’s self-esteem and his idea of the perfect life, which results in him wanting essentially to delete Tom. Gatsby’s narcissism will simply not allow him to have lost to Tom, as his life would not then be considered perfect.

Gatsby’s insistence on Daisy outright telling Tom that she never loved him can also be seen as a form of vengeance on Gatsby’s part. According to Heinz Kohut, narcissists who suffer a narcissistic injury such as a defeat can respond with what is known as narcissistic rage (380). Narcissistic rage can occur in many forms but it is based on a “need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means”, narcissists will pursue their goal of vengeance with an unrelenting drive that often renders them restless (Kohut 380). Gatsby, who feels humiliated by having lost the girl of his dream to another man believes that he can humiliate Tom by having Daisy telling him she never loved him and only agreed to the marriage because of his wealth.

Gatsby’s sense of entitlement and lack of morals become apparent several times throughout the novel and particularly regarding the source of his enormous wealth. Mitchell argues that entitlement is a major force in Gatsby’s character and that Gatsby’s sense of narcissistic entitlement means that he believes he can have what he wants whenever he wants it (Mitchell 390). Indeed, as we find out towards the end of the story, the source of Gatsby’s tremendous wealth is his partnership with the gangster Meyer Wolfshiem and organized crime. Gatsby is involved in bootlegging alcohol as well as bond scams (Fitzgerald 102). Gatsby’s narcissistic sense of entitlement results in him having seemingly no moral qualms about breaking the law to get what he wants, in this case wealth and status. Another
instance where Gatsby’s lack of morals comes under display is when he offers Nick a chance to join his side business: “You see, I carry on a little business on the side, a sort of side line . . . Well, this would interest you. It wouldn’t take up much of your time and you might pick up a nice bit of money. It happens to be a rather confidential sort of thing” (Fitzgerald 62). Gatsby has no issues with potentially corrupting and endangering Nick’s life by offering him to join his illegal business activities. Gatsby’s lack of morals is also noted by Mitchell who points out that he shows no moral conflicts about marrying and thereby dragging Daisy into a life supported by crime (390). This observation illustrates that Gatsby is not concerned with Daisy’s well-being, and only cares about what he wants because he is entitled to it. Gatsby’s affiliation with organized crime in addition to his disregard for the well-being of others are hallmarks of the unprincipled narcissist who often achieves success in society by breaking the law and being indifferent to the welfare of others.

Additionally, Gatsby shows the common narcissistic trait of exploitation. According to Millon, narcissists are interpersonally exploitative and have no problems taking advantage of others to reach their goals (Disorders of 411). For example, Gatsby shows great interest in Nick, but as Gary J. Scrimgeour argues, “only when he needs him” (72). Gatsby invites Nick to his parties, urges him to use his beach and takes him for a ride in his hydroplane seemingly for no reason until he tells Nick “I’m going to make a big request from you today” (Fitzgerald 47, 50). Gatsby’s big request is that he wants Nick to arrange a meeting with Daisy for him (Fitzgerald 58). Based on Gatsby’s big request, his friendship to Nick can be seen as merely a ruse to meet Daisy. Furthermore, it is also imperative to notice that Gatsby asked Daisy’s friend and Nick’s love interest Jordan Baker to make the big request instead of asking Nick directly (Fitzgerald 50). Gatsby believes that he might offend Nick by making the request himself, which is why he convinces Jordan to do it instead (Fitzgerald 59). Gatsby’s actions clearly indicate that he used Jordan to increase the probability of Nick accepting his request. In other words, Gatsby exploited both Nick and Jordan to meet Daisy, similar to how narcissists exploit others to reach their goals.

Dorian Gray

The Picture of Dorian Gray is in comparison to The Great Gatsby a more classic story of narcissism in terms of self-love, and therefore has many similarities with the myth of Narcissus. To begin with, the likeness between Narcissus and Dorian Gray is mentioned in the text: “This young Adonis, who looks as if he was made of ivory and rose-leaves. Why, my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus” (Wilde 6). Like
Narcissus, Gray is admired for his beauty, and complimented as being perfect and flawless on more than one occasion in the story (Wilde 190, 196). Moreover, after his friend Basil Hallward paints a portrait of him, Gray like Narcissus seemingly falls in love with his own image: “A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. He stood there motionless, and in wonder . . . The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before” (Wilde 26). Also like Narcissus, Gray spends considerable time admiring his own image “Morning after morning he had sat before the portrait wondering at its beauty, almost enamoured of it.” He even attempted to kiss the portrait: “Once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips that now smiled so cruelly at him” (Wilde 97).

The portrait also brings out Gray’s first major narcissistic moment in the novel. After realizing that he is a very beautiful man, thoughts of aging and loss of beauty due to the passage of time results in Gray panicking and wishing that the portrait would age instead of him: “If it was I who were to be always young, and the picture that were to grow old! For this—for this—I would give everything! . . . I would give my soul for that” (Wilde 27). Christopher Lasch writes that the irrational terror of old age is closely associated with the narcissist because they have very few inner resources (210). Narcissists want to be admired for their beauty, charm, power or status; attributes that more often than not fade with the passage of time (Lasch 210). Gray questions Basil’s friendship, which suggests that he believes all the praise and admiration he receives will vanish upon losing his beauty: “How long will you like me? Till I have my first wrinkle, I suppose. I know, now, that when one loses one’s good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything” (Wilde 27). Once Gray understands that with the passage of time he will lose his source of admiration, he panics and makes an irrational wish born out of the narcissistic fear of aging.

Similar to Gatsby, Gray’s narcissism can be linked to his unhappy childhood. Esther Rashkin points out several details in the text that strongly suggest that Gray is the victim of emotional child abuse by his grandfather (70). When Lord Henry discusses Gray’s past with his uncle we find out that he was left “to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man” after his mother died (Wilde 35). Furthermore, when Gray decides to hide his portrait, he hides it in the room his grandfather built: “for the use of the little grandson whom, for his strange likeness to his mother, and also for other reasons, he had always hated and desired to keep out of distance” (Wilde 112). Gray also winces at the mere mention of his grandfather as he had, “hateful memories of him” (Wilde 109). According to the U.S. Children’s Bureau, child abuse can often result in victims suffering from low self-esteem issues (4). In
light of these points, and similar to Gatsby, one could argue that Gray’s abusive and unhappy childhood has given him low self-esteem. Gray’s narcissistic traits can consequently be viewed as a form of self-regulation against low self-esteem. However, while Gatsby seeks success, prestige and status, Gray seemingly needs various sensory gratifications such as sex and drugs.

The amorous narcissists’ aim is to build up their self-esteem and self-worth through sexual exploits, and they live as a result a very hedonistic lifestyle (Millon, Disorders of 410). Gray indulges in precisely such a hedonistic and debaucherous lifestyle, which we find out when his friend Basil confronts him in an attempt to sway Gray to change his ways:

When you met Lady Gwendolen, not a breath of scandal had ever touched her. Is there a single decent woman in London now who would drive with her in the Park? . . . Then there are other stories,—stories that you have been seen creeping at dawn out of dreadful houses and slinking in disguise into the foulest dens in London . . . What about your country-house, and the life that is led there? Dorian, you don’t know what is said about you. (Wilde 138)

Given Gray’s abusive childhood, his hedonistic lifestyle can be seen as a defense mechanism to stave off low self-esteem, much like the amorous narcissist.

Similarly to the amorous narcissist, in addition to his hedonistic lifestyle, Gray exhibits a flagrant disregard of others. He leaves behind a trail of destroyed lives, consisting of suicides, disgrace and ruined careers (Wilde 137). As an example we can take a look at Gray’s treatment of the young actress Sybil Vane. Gray met Sybil during one of her plays and after roughly three weeks got engaged to marry her (Wilde 68). However, after an evidently bad theater performance Gray in an instant loses all the love he supposedly feels for her and rejects her coldly:

You have killed my love . . . You are shallow and stupid. My God! how mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again. I will never think of you. I will never mention your name . . . The world would have worshipped you, and you would have belonged to me. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face. (Wilde 81)
Sybil now in tears desperately apologizes and promises to better herself in addition to making it clear how much she loves him. But to no avail, since Gray finds her tears annoying and coldly walks away (Wilde 82). Gray’s treatment of Sybil not only shows his apparent lack of empathy, he also clearly embodies the characteristics of amorous narcissists, who may seem to want an authentic relationship but quickly tire and swiftly write off their lovers. Vera B. Profit argues that Vane is psychologically vulnerable due to her young age and infatuation with Gray, and as a result she becomes emotionally dependent on him but he responds by exploiting her youth and good will (136). Profit’s assessment further indicates traits of amorous narcissists in regards to how they take advantage of the needy and naive.

Following Vane’s suicide, Gray displays the typical narcissistic trait of repressing unwanted thoughts and memories. Narcissists have a variety of defense mechanisms at their disposal but grandiosity, rationalization and fantasy are the primary ones (Millon, *Personality Disorders* 360, 344). Gray initially briefly admits his part in Sybil’s death: “So I have murdered Sibyl Vane . . . murdered her as certainly as if I had cut her little throat with a knife” (Wilde 91). Nevertheless, he quickly begins the repression process by trivializing her death: “And the roses are not less lovely for all that. The birds sing just as happily in my garden” (Wilde 91). Gray then uses his fantasy to reduce the death of Sybil and his part in it to “a marvellous experience” and wonders if his life has further marvellous experiences in store for him (Wilde 96). Additionally, Gray rationalizes the event by seemingly convincing himself that he is the victim, and Sybil’s sacrifice is her way of atoning for her terrible theater performance:

> How had she played that dreadful last scene? Had she cursed him, as she died? No – she had died for love of him, and love would always be a sacrament to him now. She had atoned for everything, by the sacrifice she had made of her life. He would not think any more of what she had made him go through on that horrible night at the theatre. (Wilde 97)

Gray’s apparent lack of conscience regarding Sybil’s death is even noticed by himself: “And yet I must admit that this thing that has happened does not affect me as it should. It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play” (Wilde 93). Gray’s comments and thoughts after Vane’s
suicide clearly indicate that he uses primary narcissistic defense mechanisms to cope with unwanted thoughts and memories.

Additionally, Gray like most narcissists stays unemotional and dismissive in the face criticism. As an illustration we can look at Basil’s reaction when he confronts Gray about his debaucherous lifestyle, for which Basil berates Gray: “Don’t shrug your shoulders like that. Don’t be so indifferent” (Wilde 138). Basil’s comments clearly indicate that Gray is indifferent and dismissive towards his criticism. Gray’s dismissive attitude stops only when Basil sees Gray’s now hideous portrait and shows open contempt and disdain towards him:

Christ! what a thing I must have worshipped! It has the eyes of a devil . . . My God! If it is true, . . . and this is what you have done with your life, why, you must be worse even than those who talk against you fancy you to be! . . . You have done enough evil in your life. My God! Don’t you see that accursed thing leering at us? (Wilde 143-144)

Gray, who is accustomed to receiving admiration for most of his life, is now faced with disdain and condemnation. Gray’s response is intense hatred and rage, which results in him brutally stabbing Basil to death (Wilde 144). After the incident, Gray feels that “Basil had said things to him that were unbearable,” which suggests that he perceives Basil’s comments as insults (Wilde 200). According to Kohut, narcissistic rage tends to be provoked by ridicule, contempt or defeat (380). Looking at Basil’s contemptuous comments and Gray’s extreme reaction to them, an argument can be made that his response is indeed caused by narcissistic rage.

Similarly to Gatsby, Gray also uses the narcissistic trait of exploitation to reach his goals. An example of Gray’s exploitative ways can be seen when he blackmails his former friend Alan Campbell into disposing the body of Basil: “I have a letter written already. Here it is. You see the address. If you don’t help me, I must send it. If you don’t help me, I will send it. You know what the result will be.’ . . . Campbell buried his face in his hands, and a shudder passed through him” (Wilde 155). While it is not stated what information the letter contains, it is safe to assume, based on Campbell’s reaction and agreement to dispose of the body, that it would ruin his life if Gray decides to send it (Wilde 155-56). Profit addresses Gray’s exploitation of his former friend and states that when Gray coerces and dominates Campbell both emotionally and morally into doing something against his wishes, he has in
essence dehumanized him (108-109). Not only does Gray indeed dehumanize Campbell by taking away his free will and force him to do his bidding, but he also corrupts him by essentially turning him into an accessory to murder. Given these points, it becomes apparent that Gray, like most narcissists, will exploit others to reach his goal, even if it means he has to corrupt and ruin their lives.

Conclusion
In view of the protagonists’ behavior and traits, it is possible to characterize them as narcissists. Both seemingly developed an obsession with perfection, Gatsby attempted to reach the perfect life and Gray attempted to sustain perfect beauty regardless of the cost. As a consequence of their narcissistic goals their lives are marred with corruption, deception and crime. Nevertheless, due to crucial differences Gatsby and Gray depict narcissism in different ways.

Jay Gatsby is a character who out of deep feelings of inferiority derived from his perceived shameful lower class upbringing, develops grandiose and omnipotent beliefs. Consequently, he becomes obsessed with creating the perfect life by gaining success, wealth and status in order to compensate for feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem. Furthermore, Gatsby’s narcissistic obsession with perfection renders him incapable of accepting that he lost Daisy to another man. As a result, Gatsby embarks on a relentless pursuit to repeat the past in order to reclaim her. However, in his quest he sets aside all morals and chooses a life of crime and intricate lies to aid his goals. In light of these details Gatsby can be seen as a fictional illustration of the unprincipled and compensatory narcissist.

Dorian Gray shows great vanity throughout his life and prizes his perfect beauty above all else. Gray’s narcissistic obsession with his beauty compels him to be willing to even trade his soul for eternal youth. He chooses to use his beauty to live a hedonistic life full of amoral choices, which results in a trail of destroyed lives. Over the course of his debaucherous life, Gray manages to ruin countless lives by disgracing them, ruining their careers and driving them to commit suicide. Furthermore, Gray brutally murders his close friend in a narcissistic rage after being condemned for his scandalous lifestyle. Based on these details Gray can be viewed as a fictional characterization of the amorous narcissist.

Narcissism has since the myth of Narcissus become a multi-faceted diagnosis, and can therefore be portrayed differently in literature. In this essay, I have with Millon’s subtypes not only illustrated that Gatsby and Gray portray narcissism differently, but also provided the causes and effects of their
particular narcissistic behavior. Gatsby and Gray were selected for this essay because they represent
different aspects of the narcissistic spectrum, and illustrate that literary narcissism indeed has different
faces.
Works cited


