The Great Gatsby

Grammar Notes

Why the author chose this structure

9 chapters · 45 points
l1ll2lll3 × Claude Sonnet

Chapter 1

1. Complex Tense

> Tom Buchanan, who **had been hovering** restlessly about the room, stopped and rested his hand on my shoulder.

Past perfect continuous (`had been + ~ing`) shows **ongoing action up to a past moment**.

```
──[had been hovering]──▶ stopped ──▶ (now)

    continuous restless state    moment of stopping
```

The difference between `hovered` (simple past) and `had been hovering` (past perfect continuous): the latter makes the action **background** to the main event.

Why Fitzgerald chose `had been hovering`: to show Tom's restless state was **ongoing** before he stopped. Not just "he moved" but "he was in a continuous state of restless movement." The tense carries the psychology — Tom's underlying anxiety made visible through grammar.

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2. Subject-Verb Agreement

> **Most of the confidences were** unsought—frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions.

In complex subjects, verb agreement follows the **key noun**.

```
Most of the confidences were...

Subject: Most (seems singular) + of the confidences (plural)

Verb: were (agrees with plural)
```

English **forces** this grammatical precision. Even though `Most` looks singular, the verb must agree with `confidences` (plural). Compare: `Most of the information was...` — here `information` is uncountable (treated as singular), so `was`.

This isn't just grammar pedantry. The verb choice **reveals** how the speaker conceptualizes the subject — as individual items (`confidences were`) or as a mass (`information was`). Grammar carries meaning.

---

3. Relative Clause

> And so it happened that on a warm windy evening I drove over to East Egg to see two old friends **whom I scarcely knew at all**.

The relative pronoun `whom` is **objective case** — it's the object of `knew`.

```
I drove to see two friends whom I scarcely knew

                      ↑        ↑

                antecedent   object (of "knew")
```

Modern English often uses `who` instead of `whom`, but Fitzgerald maintains 1920s formality. The choice of `whom` signals **educated speech** — it characterizes Nick as someone who observes grammatical distinctions.

This isn't just correctness for its own sake. The formal `whom` creates distance between Nick and these "friends" he "scarcely knew." The grammatical precision mirrors the social precision — everything proper on the surface, but emotionally distant underneath.

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4. Parallel Structure

> Most of the confidences were unsought—frequently I have feigned sleep, preoccupation, or a hostile levity when I realized by some unmistakable sign that an intimate revelation was quivering on the horizon; **for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least the terms in which they express them**, are usually plagiaristic and marred by obvious suppressions.

The parallel structure with `or at least` **narrows the scope** of criticism.

```
the intimate revelations of young men,

or at least the terms in which they express them

    ↑

  narrowing focus (whole → part)
```

`Or at least` is a hedging device — if you can't criticize the whole thing, criticize **this much** at least. It shows Nick being **careful** in his judgment.

Why Fitzgerald uses this structure: it characterizes Nick as someone who qualifies his statements. He won't condemn young men's revelations entirely, but he will criticize their **manner of expression**. The grammar reveals a cautious, precise mind — someone who makes distinctions rather than sweeping judgments.

---

5. Subjunctive

> If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, **as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousand miles away**.

In `as if he were`, the subjunctive `were` signals **unreality**.

```
as if he were related to... (subjunctive - unreal)

vs.
```

```
as if he was related to... (indicative - possibly real)
```

The subjunctive `were` (not `was`) emphasizes this is **metaphorical**, not literal. Gatsby isn't actually related to seismic equipment — the grammar insists on the comparison's unreality.

Why Fitzgerald chose the subjunctive: it creates **aesthetic distance** while intensifying the metaphor. The grammatical signal of unreality paradoxically makes the comparison more vivid — we know it's "not real" but feel its truth more strongly because of that very distance.

Chapter 2

1. Subject-Verb Agreement

> Occasionally a **line of grey cars crawls** along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.

Collective noun with singular verb: `a line of grey cars crawls`

```
a line (singular subject) + of grey cars (prepositional phrase) + crawls (singular verb)
```

The grammatical subject is `line`, not `cars`. English grammar forces agreement with the head noun, regardless of the logical plurality of the cars.

Fitzgerald's choice of `a line` emphasizes the **visual unity** — from a distance, multiple cars appear as a single entity. The grammar reflects the observer's perspective: individual cars blur into one continuous line.

---

2. Parallel Structure

> One of the three shops it contained **was for rent and another was an all-night restaurant, approached by a trail of ashes**; the third was a garage—Repairs.

Parallel structure with repetition: `was for rent and another was...`

```
One... was for rent

and

another was an all-night restaurant
```

The repeated `was` creates rhythmic parallelism, but notice how the third breaks the pattern: `the third was a garage–Repairs.` The abrupt dash and single word create **asymmetry** after the longer descriptions.

This broken rhythm mirrors the desolate landscape — even the grammar feels worn down, unable to maintain its own pattern.

---

3. Subjunctive

> She smiled slowly and, walking through her husband **as if he were a ghost**, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye.

Subjunctive mood: `as if he were a ghost`

```
as if + he were (subjunctive)

vs. he was (indicative)
```

The subjunctive `were` signals unreality — he's not actually a ghost, but she treats him as if he doesn't exist. If Fitzgerald had written `was`, it would suggest he actually seemed ghostlike.

Myrtle walks **through** her husband as if he has no physical presence. The subjunctive grammaticalizes her complete dismissal of him — he might as well not exist.

---

4. Passive Voice

> Her eyebrows **had been plucked** and then drawn on again at a more rakish angle, but the efforts of nature toward the restoration of the old alignment gave a blurred air to her face.

Past perfect passive: `had been plucked`

```
had been + plucked (past perfect passive)


then: drawn on again (simple past passive)
```

The past perfect establishes **temporal layering**:

1. `had been plucked` — remote past (first action)
2. `drawn on again` — more recent past (second action)

Fitzgerald uses the past perfect to show that Myrtle's artificial beauty is **multiply constructed** — the natural has been erased in stages, replaced by the artificial. The grammar mirrors the archaeological layers of her self-transformation.

---

5. Relative Clause

> This is a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; **where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air**.

Cascading where-clauses: Beyond location to ontological space

```
a fantastic farm where ashes grow...


               where ashes take the forms...


                    who move dimly...
```

These `where` clauses don't just describe location — they define **modes of being**.

First `where`: ashes grow like wheat (impossible)
Second `where`: ashes become human forms (more impossible)

Fitzgerald uses the repetition of `where` to show this space operates by **different laws of reality**. Grammatically relative clauses, but functionally they're establishing the rules of a surreal world where matter transforms beyond natural possibility.

Chapter 3

1. Subjunctive

> There was a machine in the kitchen **which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb**.

```
if a little button was pressed two hundred times
```

This is **conditional**, not subjunctive. `if + past tense` can mean either:
- Subjunctive: "if it were pressed" (contrary to reality)
- Conditional: "if it is pressed" (possible situation)

Here it describes how the machine works, so it's **conditional**. The `could extract` means "would be able to," not "could have." English grammar creates ambiguity that context must resolve.

---

2. Subject-Verb Agreement

> In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that **most of his female guests were** too young to know one from another.

```
most of his female guests were too young
```

`most of + plural noun` takes **plural verb**. The agreement follows the noun after `of`:

- `most guests were` ✓
- `most of the guests were` ✓
- `most of his guests were` ✓

Even with `most of`, if the following noun is plural, the verb must be plural. English forces grammatical agreement that Korean doesn't require.

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3. Relative Clause

> As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people **of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table—the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone**.

```
the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts
```

`whom` is the object form after preposition `of`. The structure breaks down as:

```
I asked [his whereabouts] of [the people]
```

```
→ the people of whom I asked his whereabouts
```

Formal written English preserves `whom` after prepositions. Modern speech would say "people I asked" or "people who I asked." Fitzgerald uses 1920s formal register.

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4. Parallel Structure

> In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and **stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials** so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

```
stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials
```

The `with X and Y and with Z` structure repeats `with` for **emphasis**:

```
stocked with [gins and liquors] and with [cordials]
```

Fitzgerald could have written `stocked with gins, liquors, and cordials`, but the repeated `with` creates **rhythm** and emphasizes abundance. The parallel prepositions make each category feel substantial.

---

5. Passive Voice

> I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who **had actually been invited**.

```
had actually been invited
```

Past perfect passive: `had + been + pp`

```
invitation ——▶ went to party ——▶ now

(had been invited)    (went)        (believe)
```

The past perfect places the invitation **before** going to the party. `was invited` (simple past passive) vs `had been invited` (past perfect passive) — the grammar insists the invitation preceded the attendance.

Chapter 4

1. Subjunctive

> **I have forgotten their names—Jaqueline, I think, or else Consuela, or Gloria or Judy or June, and their last names were either the melodious names of flowers and months or the sterner ones of the great American capitalists whose cousins, if pressed, they would confess themselves to be.**

```
if pressed, they would confess themselves to be
```

This is **present subjunctive** with habitual `would`. The `if pressed` is short for `if they were pressed` — setting up a hypothetical scenario.

The `would confess` isn't speculation about the future, but **habitual behavior** in hypothetical situations: "whenever pressed, they would invariably confess."

Why Maugham chose this structure: to capture the **vanity** of these women. They hide it normally, but apply the slightest pressure and out comes the boasting. The grammar mirrors human nature.

---

2. Relative Clause

> From East Egg, then, came the Chester Beckers and the Leeches, and a man named Bunsen, **whom I knew at Yale**, and Doctor Webster Civet, who was drowned last summer up in Maine.

```
a man named Bunsen, whom I knew at Yale
```

`Whom` is the objective case of the relative pronoun `who`. It comes from `I knew him at Yale` where `him` becomes `whom`.

The choice between `who knew me` (subject) and `whom I knew` (object) completely changes the relationship. By using `whom`, Maugham establishes that the narrator was the **knower**, not the known.

This isn't just grammar — it's social positioning. The narrator presents himself as the one who **recognized** Bunsen, implying a certain social advantage or memory privilege.

---

3. Subject-Verb Agreement

> He reached in his pocket, and a **piece of metal, slung** on a ribbon, fell into my palm.

```
a piece of metal, slung on a ribbon, fell into my palm
```

The subject is `a piece of metal`, modified by the **past participle phrase** `slung on a ribbon`. The verb is `fell`.

```
Subject: a piece of metal
```

```
Modifier: , slung on a ribbon,  ← inserted description


Verb: fell
```

Why this structure: Maugham presents `a piece of metal` first, then adds the detail about the ribbon. This follows **visual sequence** — we see the metal object first, then notice it's suspended on a ribbon. The grammar mirrors perception.

---

4. Complex Tense

> I **hadn't been looking** at them, but I did now.

```
I hadn't been looking at them
```

This is **past perfect continuous** in negative form: `had been + -ing`.

It's different from simple past continuous `I wasn't looking`. The past perfect continuous emphasizes **duration up to a past point**:

```
──[hadn't been looking]──▶ but I did now

    continuous non-looking       moment of looking
```

Why Maugham chose this tense: to suggest the narrator had been **deliberately** avoiding looking. The perfect aspect implies intentional, sustained avoidance rather than mere coincidental non-looking.

---

5. Inversion

> From East Egg, **then, came the Chester Beckers** and the Leeches, and a man named Bunsen, whom I knew at Yale, and Doctor Webster Civet, who was drowned last summer up in Maine.

```
From East Egg, then, came the Chester Beckers
```

This is **locative inversion**. Normal order would be `The Chester Beckers came from East Egg`, but the prepositional phrase `From East Egg` is fronted and subject-verb inverted.

```
Normal: The Chester Beckers came from East Egg


Inverted: From East Egg came the Chester Beckers
```

Why inversion: to emphasize **geographical categorization**. This sentence is part of a catalog of party guests organized by location. Fronting `From East Egg` creates a clear **taxonomic structure** — "From East Egg, here's who came."

Chapter 5

1. Subject-Verb Agreement

> Gatsby looked with vacant eyes through a copy of Clay's Economics, starting at the Finnish tread that shook the kitchen floor, and peering towards the bleared windows from time to time as if a **series of invisible but alarming happenings were taking** place outside.

```
a series of happenings were taking place

     ↑(singular)         ↑(plural verb)
```

With `a series of + plural noun`, English forces a grammatical choice. `Series` is singular, but `happenings` is plural. Fitzgerald chose `were`.

He could have written `was taking place` (focusing on the series as one unit) or `were taking place` (focusing on the multiple events). The choice shapes meaning.

Why `were`? Gatsby senses not one large event, but **multiple scattered, ominous incidents**. The grammar mirrors his fragmented anxiety.

---

2. Parallel Structure

> Two **o'clock and the whole corner of the peninsula** was blazing with light, which fell unreal on the shrubbery and made thin elongating glints upon the roadside wires.

```
Two o'clock and the whole corner... was blazing

    ↑(time)  and     ↑(place)          ↑(verb)
```

This is unusual structure. Normally: "At two o'clock, the corner was blazing." But Fitzgerald uses `and` to **parallel** time and place.

The effect is **cinematic**: time and space enter the frame simultaneously. "Two o'clock, and the whole corner..." — like a film cut where the timestamp and the explosion of light happen as one moment.

The `and` creates the illusion that **time ignites space**. The arrival of the hour and the blazing light feel like a single event.

---

3. Subjunctive

> Only wind in the trees, which blew the wires and made the lights go off and on again **as if the house had winked into the darkness**.

```
as if the house had winked

              ↑(past perfect)
```

`As if + past perfect` signals **unreality about the present**. Houses don't actually wink.

English **grammatically marks** the counterfactual by pushing the tense one step back. `Had winked` (not `winked`) emphasizes that this is **not literal reality**.

Fitzgerald's choice: He could have written "like the house winked," but `had winked` emphasizes the **fantastical quality** of this moment. Gatsby's house isn't alive, but it feels alive.

---

4. Participial Construction

> But, because the offer was obviously and tactlessly **for a service to be rendered**, I had no choice except to cut him off there.

```
a service to be rendered

        ↑(passive infinitive)
```

`To be + past participle` indicates **future passive action**. `To be rendered` = "a service that will be provided" — not yet happened, and passive from the speaker's perspective.

The structure creates **formality and distance**. Instead of "help" or "favor," Fitzgerald uses `service to be rendered` — it sounds almost **contractual**.

The passive infinitive emphasizes that the narrator would be the **recipient** of the service, not the provider. It's about what would be done **for him**.

---

5. Complex Tense

> He **hadn't once ceased** looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes.

```
hadn't once ceased looking

 ↑(negative) ↑(emphasis) ↑(continuous)
```

`Hadn't once ceased` is **triple-layered**: `not` + `once` + `cease`. It's much stronger than simply "kept looking."

Why this complexity? Fitzgerald wants to show how **obsessive** Gatsby's gaze was. `Looked at` would be ordinary, but `hadn't once ceased looking` feels almost **compulsive**.

The past perfect (`hadn't`) also suggests this continuous staring had been going on for some time before the narrator's observation. It's not just "he was looking" but "he had been looking without pause."

Chapter 6

1. Complex Tense

> It was James Gatz who **had been loafing** along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out to the Tuolomee, and informed Cody that a wind might catch him and break him up in half an hour.

Fitzgerald uses `had been loafing` to emphasize **continuity**. Compare with simple past:

```
was loafing     – was doing it at that moment

had been loafing – had been doing it for some time before
```

The past perfect continuous suggests James Gatz had been living this aimless life **before** that afternoon — it wasn't just a momentary state.

But notice the shift: `borrowed`, `pulled out`, `informed` are all simple past. Fitzgerald's point: Gatz was a **continuous condition**, but Gatsby performed **decisive actions**. The tense change marks the transformation.

---

2. Subject-Verb Agreement

> Contemporary **legends such as the "underground pipeline to Canada" attached** themselves to him, and there was one persistent story that he didn't live in a house at all, but in a boat that looked like a house and was moved secretly up and down the Long Island shore.

Notice how the plural subject `legends` works with the verb `attached`:

```
Contemporary legends such as the "underground pipeline to Canada" attached themselves
```

The `such as` phrase is parenthetical — the core subject is `legends`, so `attached` is correct. But semantically, each legend individually "attached itself."

The key word is `themselves` — it creates an image of legends as **active agents** that deliberately cling to Gatsby. Not passive rumors, but living myths that seek him out.

---

3. Parallel Structure

> This was his day **off and with laudable initiative he had hurried out "to see**."

Look at what `and` connects here:

```
This was his day off and [with laudable initiative] he had hurried out
```

First clause: `This was his day off` (state)

Second clause: `he had hurried out` (action)

But `with laudable initiative` interrupts the parallel. It's an **adverbial phrase** modifying `had hurried`. This breaks the expected rhythm of simple coordination.

Fitzgerald's choice: instead of clean parallelism (`off and hurried`), he inserts the reporter's **motivation**. Not mere curiosity, but "laudable initiative" — professional duty.

---

4. Subjunctive

> One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just **as if it were five years ago**.

Notice `were` with the singular subject `it`:

```
as if it were five years ago  (subjunctive)

as if it was five years ago   (indicative)
```

This is the **past subjunctive**. The choice matters:

- `were` = completely unreal situation
- `was` = potentially real situation

Gatsby's dream is to turn back time. Fitzgerald uses `were` because this is **impossible** — the grammar itself expresses unreality. The subjunctive embeds the futility of Gatsby's hope into the sentence structure.

---

5. Passive Voice

> His life **had been confused** and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was ...

`had been confused` is past perfect passive. The active would be:

```
Something had confused his life  (active)

His life had been confused       (passive)
```

The key point: **no agent is specified**. We don't know what confused his life — circumstances? His own choices? The passive voice leaves this deliberately vague.

Fitzgerald's choice: ambiguity about responsibility. The past perfect (`had been`) shows this confusion **had been ongoing** for some time before this moment. That makes it more hopeless.

Chapter 7

1. Complex Tense

> Someone who **had been driving** a little behind us confirmed this, and the policeman turned away.

```
had been driving  ← past perfect continuous


confirmed        ← simple past
```

The past perfect continuous (`had been + ~ing`) shows an ongoing action up to a past point. Here: someone was **in the process of driving** when the incident occurred.

The tense choice matters for credibility. `drove` would suggest a completed action, but `had been driving` establishes the witness as someone who was **continuously observing** the situation. The grammar itself vouches for the reliability of the testimony.

This isn't just about time—it's about the **quality** of the observation. Continuous tense = continuous witness.

---

2. Subject-Verb Agreement

> It was when curiosity about Gatsby was at its highest that the **lights in his house failed** to go on one Saturday night—and, as obscurely as it had begun, his career as Trimalchio was over.

```
the lights in his house  ← complex subject


failed to go on         ← verb phrase
```

The grammatical subject is `lights`, not `house`. English enforces strict **subject-verb agreement**: `lights` (plural) + `failed` (plural verb). If it were singular: `light fails`.

Fitzgerald's choice of "lights" (plural) is symbolic. Gatsby's house blazed with **multiple lights** — the extravagant parties, the grand spectacle. When they all fail at once, it's not just a power outage. It's the **end of an era**.

The plural form captures both the magnificence and the scale of the fall.

---

3. Inversion

> **So engrossed was she** that she had no consciousness of being observed, and one emotion after another crept into her face like objects into a slowly developing picture.

```
Normal order: She was so engrossed


Inverted:     So engrossed was she
```

When "So + adjective" fronts the sentence, English **flips subject and verb**. This inversion is purely for emphasis.

The effect is dramatic. Normal `She was so engrossed` states a fact. Inverted `So engrossed was she` **performs** the intensity. The disrupted word order mirrors her disrupted awareness.

The grammar becomes **mimetic** — the unusual structure reflects her unusual state of absorption.

---

4. Relative Clause

> Her expression was curiously familiar—it was an expression I had often seen on women's faces, but on Myrtle Wilson's face it seemed purposeless and inexplicable until I realized that her eyes, wide with jealous terror, were fixed not on Tom, but on Jordan Baker, **whom she took to be his wife**.

```
Jordan Baker, whom she took to be his wife

          ↑

    objective case relative pronoun
```

`whom` is the **objective case** of the relative pronoun. Jordan is the object of "took" (she took Jordan to be his wife), so the objective form is grammatically required.

Modern English often uses `who` in speech, but literary English maintains the distinction. Here, `whom` carries semantic weight — it's about **misidentification**. Myrtle has the wrong target for her jealousy.

The formal `whom` also fits the elevated register of Fitzgerald's prose. It's not just grammar; it's **style**.

---

5. Parallel Structure

> I picked it up with a weary bend and handed it back to her, holding it **at arm's length and by the extreme tip of the corners** to indicate that I had no designs upon it—but everyone near by, including the woman, suspected me just the same.

```
at arm's length  and  by the extreme tip of the corners

     ↑                       ↑

 prepositional phrase    prepositional phrase
```

Two prepositional phrases in **parallel**, both describing how he held the object. The coordination creates rhythm and emphasis.

The parallel structure mirrors the character's **excessive caution**. One method would suffice, but he uses two simultaneously. The grammatical redundancy reflects his psychological over-compensation.

The `and` doesn't just connect — it **accumulates**. Each phrase adds another layer of his desperate attempt to appear innocent.

Chapter 8

1. Participial Construction

> He didn't like to go into the garage, because the work bench was stained **where the body had been lying**, so he moved uncomfortably around the office—he knew every object in it before morning—and from time to time sat down beside Wilson trying to keep him more quiet.

```
where the body had been lying

      ↑         ↑

  relative    past perfect continuous
```

`had been lying` is past perfect continuous, not just "had lain." The continuous aspect emphasizes **duration** — the body wasn't just placed there, it had been lying there for some time.

The writer chose the continuous form to make the reader feel the **sustained horror** of that scene. Not a momentary placement, but a state that had persisted through time. The stain represents not just death, but death that had **lingered**.

---

2. Complex Tense

> He believed that Mrs. Wilson **had been running** away from her husband, rather than trying to stop any particular car.

```
had been running away

    ↑

past perfect continuous – ongoing action up to that moment
```

The continuous aspect is crucial. Not "ran away" but "had been running away" — she was **in the process** of fleeing when she died.

The contrast between `had been running away` (continuous action) and `trying to stop` (momentary attempt) reveals her true intention through grammar. The tense structure tells us what she was really doing in those final moments.

---

3. Subjunctive

> He left feeling **that if he had searched harder, he might have found her—that he was leaving her behind**.

```
if he had searched harder, he might have found her

   ↑                   ↑

past perfect           past modal perfect
```

```
(condition)           (result)
```

Classic past counterfactual. The **double past** structure (`had searched` + `might have found`) creates distance from reality, expressing regret.

Then the tense shifts back to present continuous: `he was leaving her behind`. From the unreal (past counterfactual) to the immediate feeling (past continuous). The tense movement mirrors the emotional journey from speculation to present pain.

---

4. Subject-Verb Agreement

> The **shadow of a tree fell** abruptly across the dew and ghostly birds began to sing among the blue leaves.

```
The shadow of a tree fell

    ↑              ↑

 singular subject   singular verb
```

The subject is `shadow`, not `tree`. The prepositional phrase `of a tree` modifies the subject but doesn't affect verb agreement.

In literary prose, subjects often carry heavy modification. The key is identifying the **head noun** that controls the verb. Here: `shadow` (singular) → `fell` (singular verb).

---

5. Relative Clause

> Thus far there was no difficulty in accounting for his time—there were boys who had seen a man "acting sort of crazy," and motorists **at whom he stared oddly from the side of the road**.

```
motorists at whom he stared oddly

          ↑

    preposition + whom
```

From `he stared at motorists` → `motorists at whom he stared`

The preposition `at` (from `stare at`) moves to the front with `whom`. This is formal written style. Informal would be `whom he stared at oddly`, but literary prose prefers the preposition fronted.

This pattern appears frequently in formal writing: `the house in which he lived`, `the reason for which he came`.

Chapter 9

1. Subject-Verb Agreement

> When Michaelis's testimony at the inquest brought to light Wilson's suspicions of his wife I thought the whole tale would shortly be served up in racy pasquinade—but **Catherine, who might have said anything, didn't say** a word.

Catherine, who might have said anything, didn't say a word

The relative clause `who might have said anything` is **embedded** between subject and verb:

```
Catherine [who might have said anything] didn't say a word

subject   [embedded clause: extra info]    main verb
```

This creates **suspense**. The reader must navigate through the embedded information before learning what Catherine actually did.

`might have said` expresses past possibility — "could have spoken (but didn't)." This sets up the contrast with `didn't say`. Fitzgerald uses the embedding to amplify this irony: maximum potential, zero action.

---

2. Relative Clause

> After that I felt a certain shame for Gatsby—one gentleman **to whom I telephoned** implied that he had got what he deserved.

one gentleman to whom I telephoned

Here `whom` is the object of the preposition `to`. The original sentence was "I telephoned **to** one gentleman," and when relativized, `to whom` moves to the front:

```
Original: I telephoned to him

Relative: to whom I telephoned
```

`to whom` vs `who I telephoned to` — both are grammatical, but Fitzgerald chooses the formal `to whom`. This reflects the narrator's educated, upper-class register in the 1920s setting.

---

3. Parallel Structure

> She showed a surprising amount of character about it too—looked at the coroner with determined eyes under that corrected brow of hers, and swore that her sister had never seen Gatsby, that her sister **was completely happy with her husband, that her sister had been into no mischief whatever**.

that her sister was completely happy..., that her sister had been into no mischief

Three `that` clauses in parallel after `swore`:

```
swore that her sister had never seen Gatsby,

      that her sister was completely happy with her husband,

      that her sister had been into no mischief whatever
```

The triple `that` repetition creates **emphatic denial**. Each clause builds Catherine's desperate defense, but the very accumulation suggests doubt. Grammatical parallelism mirrors psychological urgency.

---

4. Inversion

> In the foreground four solemn men in dress suits are walking along the sidewalk with a stretcher **on which lies a drunken woman** in a white evening dress.

on which lies a drunken woman

This is **locative inversion**. Normal order would be "a drunken woman lies on which," but that's impossible in a relative clause. So we get "on which lies a drunken woman."

```
Normal: A woman lies on the stretcher

Inverted: on which lies a drunken woman
```

The inversion creates **visual sequencing**. "on which lies" — the reader's eye moves to the stretcher, then discovers the woman lying there. Grammar follows the movement of perception.

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5. Passive Voice

> There was one thing to be done before I left, an awkward, unpleasant thing that perhaps **had better have been let** alone.

had better have been let alone

This is a complex layered structure:

```
had better have been let alone

|   |     |   |   |

|   |     |   |   └─ past participle (passive)

|   |     |   └─ be (passive auxiliary)

|   |     └─ have (perfect)
```

```
|    └─ better (comparative)

└─ had (subjunctive)
```

`had better` = advice/regret

`have been` = completed state

`let alone` = leave undisturbed (passive)

The narrator is expressing **retrospective regret**. "It would have been better if that thing had been left undone." The perfect subjunctive embeds the regret into the grammar itself.