

George F. Will

## A California Gatsby

Part 3/52/75

LOS ANGELES—Hugh Hefner was born in Chicago, hog butcher for the world, city of the big shoulders. He built a \$200 million empire on breasts, and then took up California dreaming.

Oh, westward the course of empire. Hefner, the tuning fork of American fantasies, knows that if F. Scott Fitzgerald were writing today he would say that California, not Long Island, is "the fresh, green breast of the new world."

*"... I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. ... Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us."*

Hefner, guiding genius of Playboy magazine, has grasped his dream. He savors it here in his 30-room mock-Tudor mansion set on five acres where apes gambol and peacocks strut and movie stars materialize at odd hours in Hefner's private grove of redwoods, all God's creatures having fun being rich together.

*"... for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder."*

Step now out of history, into Hefner's house at the edge of the conquered continent. The house is a monument to wondrous, conquering technology.

It is a wired cocoon staffed by platoons of servants, including five full-time electricians who nurse Hefner's toys—pinball machines, stereos, television cassette machines, video tape cameras, hidden panels concealing movie projectors. The house is Hefner's triumphant gesture as the quintessential modern man: he suspends time, imposing his will upon his world with electronic will.

*"If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about (Gatsby), some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life. ..."*

The center of Hefner's controlled



Hugh Hefner, the "tuning fork of American fantasies."

universe is The Bed. Its dials and buttons summon servants and operate a movable canopy of mirrors and various audio and visual entertainments, including a low-light video tape camera pointed at The Bed.

*"(Gatsby) knew women early, and since they spoiled him he became contemptuous of them, of young virgins because they were ignorant, of the others because they were hysterical about things which in his overwhelming self-absorption he took for granted. ... The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night. ... For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing."*

Hefner meets the world not much, and always on his terms. To mingle with his flamingos and macaws and other birds of paradise, your name must be on the guard's admittance list, and Infirmary is never on the list.

*"... and Gatsby was overwhelmingly aware of the youth and mystery that wealth imprisons and preserves. ..."*

One of those dials or buttons in the

house—he's not sure which one but he's sure there is one—is capturing time itself on low-light video tape, ready for instant replay, world without end, amen.

*"As I went over to say good-by I saw that the expression of bewilderment had come back into Gatsby's face, as though a faint doubt had occurred to him as to the quality of his present happiness."*

Hefner entertains many things, but never doubts. He knows that push-pin is as good as poetry, and backgammon is better. He plays games in Shangri-la, frantically, and he plays, he says, "for escape." They are a part of living out "the adolescent fantasies I've never really lost."

*"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."*