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MSc AMERICAN STUDIES

THESIS: The Roaring Twenties As Depicted In Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"

STUDENT: ANTONIOS ELEFTHERAKIS

STUDENT ID: MAS21001

SUPERVISOR: professor KONSTANTINA E. BOTSIOU

MEMBERS OF THE COMITTEE: professor Sylvia Maier

professor Marilena Simiti

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to delve into the historical period of the Roaring Twenties as depicted in Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Great Gatsby*. The profound effects of the first World War brought about significant changes in the American society and underscored the un-American experience that led to the extravagant way of life of the era. These changes were filtered by the literary circle of the "lost generation" in which Fitzgerald, the great chronicler of the Twenties belonged. The decade between 1920 and 1930 was also the Prohibition era in the United States during which trading and consuming alcohol was theoretically banned. Bootlegging and speakeasies flourished and people who wanted to make money and climb up the social ladder, such as Jay Gatsby, grabbed the chance and made a fortune out of these illicit activities. The Twenties was also the decade in which women sought for liberation from patriarchal stereotypes and "flappers" made their appearance in literature, mainly in Fitzgerald's oeuvre, becoming a trend. The female characters of *The Great Gatsby* portrayed the characteristics of the new woman, who would defy social conformism and live her life in her own terms, drinking, smoking, driving and flirting. Two other very important notions regarding the Twenties are these of race and class. *The Great Gatsby* mirrors the widespread beliefs regarding the Nordic Race and White Supremacy and illustrates the way immigrants and black people were treated in the American society. Additionally, Gatsby himself is the perfect example of "a Mister Nobody from Nowhere" who – in his attempt to win Daisy's heart- climbed up the social ladder and became wealthy and famous through his bootlegging activities, showing that class mobility was a reality back in the Twenties and accentuating the fact that this class mobility was, more often than not, achieved in illegal ways. *The Great Gatsby*, along with the decade of the Roaring Twenties have become synonyms of jazz music, a ground breaking music genre that followed the revolt of the era stemming from the heart of the African-American community. This music, played in the background of Gatsby's parties, became the "soundtrack" of the "Jazz Age", a term coined by Fitzgerald. Automobiles was another characteristic of this era. Cars became affordable to a great number of Americans and this trend revolutionized the way of life in the United States. When it comes to Gatsby, cars play a symbolic role and they are closely linked to the characters and the plot. What has been described so far could be the epitome of the

American Dream; Was the decade of the Twenties the ideal period for someone to experience the American Dream? Did Gatsby live the American Dream? This paper aims to examine these questions and show the juxtaposition between scholars regarding this ambivalent term. Last but not least, this paper deals with the four Hollywood adaptations of the Great Gatsby and how they filtered the special characteristics of the Roaring Twenties.

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Introduction

For people who study the era of the Roaring Twenties, F. Scott Fitzgerald is the one that has captured the exuberant and loud decade of social liberation that followed the first World War, a war that changed the face of the world as it was known and brought about significant changes in the very foundations of modern time societies all over the world. With regard to the American society, the impact of the first World War boosted the un-American feelings that led people to abandon traditional American values and adopt a new , extravagant and bold lifestyle living their lives to the maximum.

Some might wonder, why are the Twenties called “Roaring”? Firstly, the roaring of this very special decade is linked to the tumultuous way of life that a lot of people adopted in the United States of America and the raucous laughter of people who attended wild parties and consumed illegal alcohol, albeit it was forbidden during the Prohibition era. From the end of the first World War until the great economic recession people experienced an era of unprecedented prosperity and felt that it was about time to implement groundbreaking changes in their lifestyle. Especially women sought to find a way to be heard and adopted new ways of life that a conservative minority -attached to the puritan past of the U.S- would call immoral. The shift towards the new lifestyle as described in the previous lines could stem from the fact that the Americans had decided to quit – for a while- their isolationism doctrine and thus interact with the way of life of other peoples around the world. Another explanation would be the extended use of cars as means of transportation in the U.S and parts of Europe; highways and cars synthesized the new reality for American people and the “roaring” of the engines was now part of the everyday life of the majority of them. The roaring cars in the Twenties constituted one of the aspects of the “American Dream”, the most materialistic one, related to showing off and proving what you are in terms of what you own.

The Great Gatsby is the novel which presents the quintessence of the Jazz Age America providing a chronicle of the era. In Gatsby, Fitzgerald included every aspect of the Twenties and according to Sarah Pruitt, through his novel he wondered whether the American society was so much emerged into post -war materialism and consumer culture that it had lost its moral compass¹. Although

¹ Pruitt, Sarah. “How “the Great Gatsby” Chronicled the Dark Side of the Roaring ’20s.” HISTORY, A&E Television Networks, 16 Nov. 2018, www.history.com/news/great-gatsby-roaring-twenties-fitzgerald-dark-side. [Accessed 15 Jul. 2022]

it is essentially a novel that captures the exuberance of the Twenties, Fitzgerald portrays and eventually accentuates the dark side of the era, thus criticizing the corruption and immorality hidden beneath the glamor and the superficial shine. Was the money the answer to all problems? Was wealth and the voluptuous indulgence to luxury the way to experience the “American Dream”? These core questions along with the depth of the features and details that synthesize the Great Gatsby explain why this novel has had such a great impact in the world of academia, as well as in artistic production; Regarding film production, for instance, The Great Gatsby has been an inspiration to several film adaptations presenting aspects of the Twenties in different ways.

The aim of this paper is to delve into the Twenties and shed light into how inextricably linked Fitzgerald’s novel and the Roaring Twenties are and show that the Great Gatsby can be used as a guide to this mysterious, fascinating, glamorous and yet decadent era.

1. Echoes of WWI in the Roaring Twenties; The Lost Generation and “The Great Gatsby”.

World War one has significantly changed the world as it was known before 1914. The American society was drastically transformed from the involvement in the war. During its first years the United States had decided to avoid taking part in the conflict with President Woodrow Wilson declaring neutrality, thus aligning with the doctrine of Isolationism that pertained American foreign policy since the “birth” of the new Nation ². However, steering clear of the war was no longer an option for the Americans, as the Germans became more and more aggressive, attacking unarmed civilian vessels and putting in danger the lives of Europeans and Americans alike in cases such as the sinking of “Lusitania” in which nearly 1,200 people were killed and 128 Americans were among the dead ³. The escalation of these attacks led the American public opinion - along with president Wilson- to decide that the United States of America should no longer be neutral and finally entered the war in 1917. Woodrow Wilson once said to a friend considering declaring war on Germany: *“Once lead this people into war and they’ll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance. To fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into every fiber of our national life”*. ⁴ Americans fought for the values and the ideals of their fathers, hence their intervention was forceful and grand.

American assistance was “Godsend”⁵ for the Allies that were worn out and the millions of American troops swiftly shifted the balance against the Germans and their Allies. An armistice was signed on November 1918 and peace negotiations officially ended the war in 1919 with the United States now being a preeminent power playing a leading role at an international level in accordance with the president’s plan to reshape the post-war world. Wilson envisioned peace and prosperity to make the seeds of democracy spread and the United States would lead the way in this new world order.

² McNeese, Tim. *World War I and the Roaring Twenties, 1914-1928*. Infobase Publishing, New York, 2010. p.8

³ McNeese, *World War I*, p.22

⁴ Christian G. Appy, Thomas V. Di Bacco, and Lorna C. Mason. *History of the United States*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991. p.511.

⁵ McNeese, *World War I*, p.8

When the fighting seized on November 11, 1918, a vast new audience for new ideals and new ideas that sprang out of “a simultaneous moment of world cynicism”⁶ came as an aftermath of the fact that younger generations held the elders responsible for the deaths of millions of people around the world. The generation of people who reached adulthood during or just after World War I was first referred to as the “Lost Generation”, which would be used to describe the “disoriented, wandering, directionless”⁷ generation of people, who had survived the war and were traumatized by it. More profoundly, this disoriented, lost generation deeply believed that the conservative and stereotypical social and moral beliefs of their parents and grandparents were obsolete in a post-war era and this was expressed with changes in their way of life. In the U.S.A, President Warren G. Harding heralded the “*back to normalcy*”⁸ policy, thus calling people to return to a way of life pretty much the same as the one before the war. However, the lost generation in the United States felt spiritually alienated by the President’s policy, which called for a return to the way of life before World War I. They were afraid of living what they thought would be “*hopelessly provincial, materialistic, and emotionally barren lives*”⁹.

In Literature the term “Lost Generation” was coined by Gertrude Stein an American writer who held a prominent place in the Parisian literary circles. It was Gertrude Stein who, in Paris in 1921, told Ernest Hemingway that he and his friends who had served in World War I “*are a lost generation.*” Hemingway objected and Stein answered, “*You are [lost]. You have no respect for anything. You drink yourselves to death.*”¹⁰ Hemingway later used the phrase “lost generation” as the book’s epigraph when he published his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926. The most profound chronicler of the “lost generation,” was Scott Fitzgerald. His stories during the 1920s were deeply autobiographical centering on hedonistic, self-indulgent young

⁶ Risen, Tom. “World War I, the 1920s and Modern Cool.” *US News & World Report*, U.S. News & World Report, 2014, www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/07/30/world-war-i-the-1920s-and-modern-cool. [Accessed 15 Jul. 2022]

⁷ Longley, Robert. “The Lost Generation and the Writers Who Described Their World.” *ThoughtCo*, ThoughtCo, 7 Mar. 2018, www.thoughtco.com/the-lost-generation-4159302. [Accessed 15 Jul. 2022]

⁸ Tindall, George Brown, and David E. Shi. *America: A narrative history*. WW Norton & Company, New York, 2016. p. 1052

⁹ Longley, “*The Lost Generation*” , [Accessed 15 Jul. 2022]

¹⁰ Cowley, Malcolm. *Exile’s Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*. Penguin, London, 1994. p.3

men and women who lived the “Jazz Age” to its maximum; Cynical and audacious, they lived the frenzy of the “Roaring Twenties” in glamorous parties and indulged into romances.¹¹ Such were the characters of “The Great Gatsby”, one of Scott Fitzgerald’s greatest novels, set in 1922, four years after the official end of the first World War. The novel very vividly reflects and depicts the ways in which the American society was drastically transformed into one of unparalleled economic boom and an unprecedented business growth that meant a steady increase in income levels for America¹² after the end of this ferocious conflict.

At first glance, someone would say that the subject of the World War seems to be loosely or indirectly linked to the Great Gatsby. However, the war deeply affects the plotline of the novel in two ways; Firstly, it was the war that separated Jay Gatsby and Daisy Fay when the two were in love in their prime days. Their love affair should come to an abrupt end and the war would stigmatize them forever, as the young couple would not have been through all this ordeal, so intensely described in *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald, had it not been for the war that separated them¹³. Gatsby had the patriotic duty to serve his country as a soldier and that meant that he was obliged to sacrifice his personal happiness so as to go to battle. The young couple was torn apart and Daisy was not willing to wait for him, given that taking part in a war was rather precarious. She could not know if he would survive or not and driven out of cynicism – addressing to Nick Daisy admits that she is “*pretty cynical about everything*”- ¹⁴and personal interest, she decided to marry Nick Buchannan, a husband who would make sure that she had the standard of living that she had always dreamt of.

Gatsby “a Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” ¹⁵ made himself a great fortune and bought an extravagant mansion; He threw lavish parties, invited people from all over New York, drove a beautiful fast car and lived a life in affluence and wealth. Jay Gatsby was engulfed in a mysterious veil that made people curious about him, about his origins and his business. Some

¹¹ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1056

¹² Pruitt. “How “the Great Gatsby” Chronicled the Dark Side of the Roaring ’20s. [Accessed 15 Jul. 2022]

¹³ Friedrich, Toni. *The Roaring Twenties- Historical Circumstances of the Great Gatsby*. Grin Publishing House, Halle, 2007. p.4

¹⁴ Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Alma Classics, Richmond, 2011, p.19

¹⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.129

of his guests at the party – who had never met him in person and did not even know the way he looked- believed that he was a German Spy during the war. One of the guests said that he had heard from someone that knew all about Gatsby, that he grew up in Germany, with a girl answering that this could not be the case, because Gatsby had fought in the American Army during the war. “I’ll bet he killed a man”, she exclaims.¹⁶ This speculation regarding Gatsby’s identity and how this was linked to the first World War, made him even more mysterious and hard to understand, which excited the curious people who attended his parties.

The war is also present in another character dynamic in “The Great Gatsby”, that of Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby who had both fought against the Germans in France. Gatsby tells Nick that his “face is familiar” and Nick explains that he was in “the Sixteenth Division until June nineteen-eighteen”¹⁷. The fact that they shared this experience was definitely something that brought them very close as they could empathize with each other, since they both knew what it meant to risk your life for the ideals of your country. They spent time talking to each other about “some wet, grey little villages in France”¹⁸ and they exchanged war experiences that brought them close to one another, thus starting a strong friendship in which the one would be the alter ego of the other.

The Great Gatsby-along with other literature pieces of authors that belong to the “Lost Generation”- clearly resonate all the great and deep changes that had affected the American society, however it must be stated that albeit the impact of the war in the American society was deep, there was an overwhelming majority of Americans who did not necessarily embrace the new values and attitudes reflected in novels of Fitzgerald and Hemingway and did not identify themselves with the sense of disobedience and alienation. According to Tindall and Shi,¹⁹ the majority of Americans, including a significant number of authors and artists, did not share their sentiments of rebellious despair or their contempt for the decadence that dominated the middle-class society. The majority of Americans preferred traditional and conventional ideals instead; They were staunch supporters of the Prohibition believing that the banning of the

¹⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.45

¹⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.48

¹⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.48

¹⁹ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1056

consumption of alcohol would reduce crime and corruption and some of them supported the KKK thus perpetrating violence and radical ideas against immigrants, amongst others. The same people rejoiced the affluence and the riches of the time and went along with customary American beliefs that were rooted in their hearts.

That explains why during the 1920s neither Hemingway nor Fitzgerald were the best-selling authors. It was an Ohio dentist, Zane Grey and his popular western novels that had a huge impact in the wide American audience. James Hart, a famous literary critic, wrote “We turn to him not for insight into human nature and human problems, nor for refinements of art, but simply for crude epic stories.”²⁰ Hart explains that Zane’s literature dealt with desperadoes, scouts and cowboys involved in stereotyped struggle between “ruthless villains” and “noble heroes”, who fought valiantly to protect American soil and “homespun heroines”²¹. The stark contrast between the fiction of Zane Grey and Scott Fitzgerald—as well as their readers—illustrated once more how divided and contradictory cultural life had grown to be in the 1920s.

Despite all of the focus on modernism²² and cultural radicalism both then and after, optimism rather than disillusionment or despair characterized daily life between the end of World War I and the start of the Great Depression. The dominant influences pertaining the American society throughout the 1920s were political conservatism (which was expressed through the Prohibition and the return to isolationism) , economic expansion, mass consumption, and eccentric joviality, which together anchored a contradictory " epoch of confusion."²³

²⁰ Hart, James David. *The popular book: A history of America's literary taste*. Univ of California Press, Oakland, 1950, p. 218

²¹ Hart, *The popular book*, p. 218

²² Regarding Modernism Tindall and Shi (Tindall, George Brown, and David E. Shi. *America: A narrative history*. p. 1058) write: “The carnage of the Great War shattered Americans’ belief in the progress of Western civilization. In the movement known as modernism, young artists and intellectuals reflected this disillusionment. For modernists, the world could no longer be easily observed through reason, common sense, and logic; instead, reality was something to be created and expressed through new artistic and literary forms, like abstract painting, atonal music, free verse in poetry, and stream-of-conscious narrative and interior monologues in stories and novels.”

²³ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1057

2. Prohibition during the twenties; “The Noble Experiment” and “The Great Gatsby”.

For a reader of *The Great Gatsby*, it seems striking that the consumption of alcohol is practically everywhere in the novel. Drinking liquor is a recurring theme and it should not go unnoticed that out of the nine chapters of the book, there is not even a single one not mentioning alcohol, liquor drinking or referring to a person who is drunk.²⁴ The characters are passionate for some of them, for example Tom and Daisy, drinking makes them speak very boldly with few inhibitions. It is very well known that Fitzgerald himself had a tendency to indulge to alcohol very often and according to Ruth Prigozy²⁵ the *Great Gatsby* was a dire critique of the novelist towards the era of the Prohibition.

The Prohibition during the 1920s was a period covering 14 years of U.S. history -from 1920 to 1933- during which all kinds of alcoholic beverages along with their manufacturing, trading and transportation had been outlawed. This decision to prohibit wine, beer, whiskey and any kind of liquor was perceived as an act of “moral righteousness” and “social conformity”.²⁶ It was around 1900 when, the two leading temperance organizations, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Anti-Saloon League, had first launched a national campaign aiming at a prohibition law. In just ten years’ time, the Anti-Saloon League had managed to become one of the most influential groups in the U.S history supporting only “dry candidates” as elected officials.²⁷ Both groups often worked “hand-in-glove” with Protestant denominations in the fight against alcohol and its potential evils²⁸ and at first, they called for moderation. After the 1900s, they became more radical and the focus shifted to

²⁴ Matthews, Ronald “The Prevalence of Liquor in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *the Great Gatsby*.” *Bleeding Through*, 12 Nov. 2018, www.bleedingthrough.com/the-prevalence-of-liquor-in-f-scott-fitzgeralds-the-great-gatsby/. [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

²⁵Prigozy, Ruth, Introduction: “Scott, Zelda, and the Culture of Celebrity” in Prigozy, Ruth ed. *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

²⁶ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1031

²⁷ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1031

²⁸ McNeese, *World War I*, p.89

complete prohibition of alcohol consumption. Alcohol was blamed for many of the ills of the society especially crime and murder and the consumption of liquor was believed to lead to debauchery and evil.²⁹

Michael Lerner writes that German Americans were scorned because they “eat like gluttons and drink like swine” and in propagating pamphlets supporting the Prohibition Italian immigrants were referred to as “Dagos, who drink excessively live in a state of filth and use the knife on slightest provocation.”³⁰ For many anti-alcohol crusaders, the primary goal of outlawing and forbidding alcoholic beverages altogether seemed to be controlling the behavior of the poor and destitute, the immigrants and the working class³¹ and for many others it was a clear infringement of their personal freedom and of their right to free choice, thus constituting a violation of people’s constitutional rights.³²

After the United States decided to get involved in World War I, the prohibition was interlinked with patriotism as the grains would rather be used for food, so as to support domestic production and the soldiers in the battle and – most importantly- the hostility and prejudice against German Americans who were accused for being “non-patriotic” using the money they made through brewery to support the German Army.³³ On December 18, 1917, the Eighteenth Amendment signified the Prohibition era, which was not officially imposed before the beginning of 1920 one year after ratification. This decision banned the manufacture, sale, and transportation of intoxicating liquors. The people who had fought to support this social reform were fanaticized and a popular evangelist named Billy Sunday said: “Men will walk upright now; women will smile and the children will laugh.”³⁴

²⁹ Rosenberg, Jennifer. "The History of Prohibition in the United States." ThoughtCo, Sep. 9, 2021, [thoughtco.com/history-of-prohibition-1779250](https://www.thoughtco.com/history-of-prohibition-1779250). [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

³⁰ Lerner, A. Michael *Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge : Massachusetts, 2008, p.32

³¹ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1032

³² Smith, Russ. “Forbidden Pleasures.” *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Mar. 2007, www.wsj.com/articles/SB117495666030049785. [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

³³ McNeese, *World War I*, p.89

³⁴ Chafetz, E. Morris. “Opinion - Billy Sunday’s Belief.” *The New York Times*, 4 Aug. 1997, www.nytimes.com/1997/08/04/opinion/l-billy-sunday-s-belief-460990.html. [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

The Prohibition meant to bring such social reform that some years after its official implementation President Herbert Hoover coined the term "The Noble Experiment" to refer to the Prohibition period. It was called "Noble" because its goal was to "purify" American society, make sure that families would be kept together and that adultery, debauchery, prostitution and every pathogenic aspect of social life would be eliminated. Also, interaction with other peoples during World War I and their lifestyles, which were very different to those of Americans, accentuated the need for the American society to be kept pure and sober. However, the officials clearly understood that reducing or eliminating alcohol use and excessive abuse was – at the same time- a social "experiment" because people in the United States would be pushed to their limits.

Evidently, "The Noble Experiment", this colossal attempt to reform the American society proved -at the same time- to be a colossal failure, because instead of convincing people to abstain from alcohol and follow a more righteous path, it gave them the incentive to use their ingenuity and find "illegal" ways to consume or trade alcohol. The Volstead Act of 1919 stated that "beer, wine, or other intoxicating malt or vinous liquors" meant any alcoholic beverage containing more than 0.5% alcohol by volume. The Act also stated that manufacturing alcohol or owning manufacturing equipment was also illegal and it stipulated specific fines and even jail sentences for violating the law ³⁵. Although the Volstead Act specified the basic rules and regulations regarding the Eighteenth Amendment, it had so many "loopholes" allowing people to evade all the repercussions of consuming, trading and even consuming alcoholic beverages. According to the act, people were allowed to store and consume, but not trade any kind of alcoholic beverage owned on January 16, 1919, thus leaving a "window" for people to stock up before this specific date. It is reported, for example, that the Yale Club in Manhattan stored enough liquor the whole period of the fourteen years of the Prohibition was enforced.³⁶ Also, The Volstead Act allowed alcohol consumption if it was prescribed by a doctor for medicinal

³⁵ Rosenberg, "The History of Prohibition" [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

³⁶ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1032

use. It goes without saying that large numbers of prescriptions were written by physicians and even veterinarians for use of alcohol for “medicinal purposes”.³⁷

In the early years of the ban, wealthy New Yorkers relished taking the risk of “flirting with crime” and enjoyed “slumming” in parties that were organized in areas like Harlem, which were not frequented by the well-off³⁸. Parties such as these are a recurring leitmotiv in *The Great Gatsby*. One of the lavish, affluent parties where people used to go to consume extreme amounts of alcohol and food is described in detail by Scott Fitzgerald:

“At least once a fortnight a corps of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough coloured lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby’s enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d’oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. 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.”³⁹

These rowdy, crowded parties took place in the majestic Gatsby manor and alcohol, which was illegal at the time, was in abundance. Gatsby says that he always keeps his mansion “full of interesting people, people who do interesting things. Celebrated people”⁴⁰. People got drunk and ended up fighting or flirting around. In the parties as described above, Fitzgerald, the chronicler of the roaring twenties sends an important message; The United States never went “dry” and the Prohibition failed no matter how much people insisted towards the opposite.⁴¹

The illegal activity that followed the prohibition was one of the most important reasons that led to the prohibition failing. Speakeasies, illegal bars and clubs where there was no segregation between rich and poor, black or white, man or woman emerged everywhere across the United States and according to the New York police commissioner in 1922 there were around 32,000 speakeasies. This extremely lucrative business came as an aftermath of the fact

³⁷ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1032

³⁸ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.48

³⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.40

⁴⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.90

⁴¹ Weinstein, Arnold. “Fiction as Greatness: The Case of Gatsby.” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1985, p. 22, 10.2307/1345714. [Accessed 23 Apr. 2019].

that the 1920s saw no decline in the level of American consumption of alcohol. McNeese explains that drinking actually went up, and this could be attributed to the increase in the amount of public drinking done by the era's liberated young women⁴² as well as the millions of European immigrants who had now settled in the United States and they had grown accustomed to consuming alcohol in their everyday life. This new illegal market gave space to outlaw activities and criminals known as bootleggers, who most usually produced and traded illegal alcoholic beverages across the United States. In many cases this alcohol was illegally imported from Canada and Mexico⁴³ and then sold in speakeasies. During this period, there were newly hired Prohibition agents whose responsibility was to raid speakeasies, find and confiscate stocks of liquor and arrest gangsters who were involved, however many of these agents were very either prone to corruption and bribery because they were underpaid or they were afraid of their lives and they finally indulged in allowing the illegal business to be done.⁴⁴

One not so clandestine speakeasy⁴⁵ where people consumed alcohol ignoring the heavy fines of the law is described in the *The Great Gatsby*, when Carraway and Gatsby visit the "well-fanned forty-second street cellar"⁴⁶ in a very natural way, without worrying that they might be found out or that there may be consequences following their actions. Over lunch, Gatsby introduces Nick to his friend Meyer Wolfsheim, a criminal who fixed the outcome of the 1919 World Series baseball tournament.⁴⁷ It seems that Gatsby, with Wolfsheim's help, became rich through bootlegging and the high profits that he made out of this extremely lucrative business allowed him to live this lavish, flamboyant and eccentric life, so as to be able to win Daisy's heart. During one of Gatsby's parties Gatsby's guests speculate that he *might* be a bootlegger⁴⁸, but Fitzgerald does not confirm these rumors until Tom finds out about Gatsby and Daisy's past and present and reveals that he had found out that Gatsby and Wolfsheim had

⁴² McNeese, *World War I*, p.89

⁴³ McNeese, *World War I*, p.90

⁴⁴ Rosenberg, "The History of Prohibition ", [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

⁴⁵ Churchwell, Sarah. *Careless people: murder, Mayhem and the invention of The Great Gatsby*. Hachette, U.K, 2013, p.222

⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

⁴⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, pp.70-74

⁴⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.61

bought several side-street drugstores in New York and Chicago and they sold grain liquor⁴⁹. Readers might have been prepared for that since Gatsby offered Nick a deal regarding a rather “confidential” sort of business deal that would bring him a lot of money without specifying exactly what it was about⁵⁰.

Southern Europeans, mainly Italian immigrants and Jewish Americans had a very prominent position among the leaders of organized crime in America during the 1920s and this could be attributed to the fact that their restricted access to legally sanctioned positions of power, wealth and influence were limited because of the prejudice and xenophobia that prevailed in the American society during the 1920s⁵¹. Such renowned figures as Al Capone, Lucky Luciano and Meyer Lansky decided to dive deep in crime and placed themselves outside the law. Pauly establishes the connection between Fitzgerald’s Jewish gangster Meyer Wolfsheim and one of the most notorious underworld figures of the Roaring Twenties, the corrupt gambler Arnold Rothstein. He was involved in a number of extensive enterprises along with bootlegging and other illegal activities.⁵² Pauly also focuses on Fitzgerald’s actual encounter with Rothstein in 1937 and asserts that Rothstein has been the inspiration for the character of Meyer Wolfsheim⁵³, who has been suggested to represent a “deliberately distorted, antisemitic” version of Rothstein.⁵⁴

Lerner⁵⁵ describes an anecdote regarding Prohibition referring to the official visit of the mayor of Berlin, Germany, Gustav Boess, nine years after its ratification. Boess spent a whole week in New York and did the normal things that tourists do, including sightseeing and dining out. He was really astounded by the beauty and the grandeur of this roaring metropolis, which was far from the European standards. Just before leaving, Boess felt like asking the mayor of New York, James J. Walker a very interesting but at the same time awkward question “When

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.133

⁵⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, pp. 82-83

⁵¹ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby: Class and Anti-Semitism in Fitzgerald's 1920s America." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 10, 2012, p.55

⁵² Pauly, Thomas H. "Gatsby as Gangster." *Studies in American Fiction*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1993, p. 227

⁵³ Pauly, "Gatsby as Gangster", p. 227

⁵⁴ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.55

⁵⁵ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.11

does the Prohibition law go into effect?"⁵⁶ The consumption of alcohol was ubiquitous and the measures against it were so loose that the mayor of Berlin did not realize that Prohibition was in place.

The anti-Prohibition movement grew stronger and stronger in the 1920s. Alcohol consumption remained a thorny issue for the whole decade as there was significant activism following the ratification of the 18th amendment. The National Chairman of the Association Against the Prohibition Amendment, William Stayton wrote: “ *Instead of silence of the accomplishments in terms of increased death rate from alcoholism, decreased arrests from drunkenness, empty jails, decreased seizures of liquors, stills and liquid making apparatus, farmer prosperity and in terms of temperance and sobriety in general, we are being told that prohibition is "still on trial" ever had a chance and that it has suffered from constant criticism from both its friends and foes.*”⁵⁷ Also, for the vast majority of people consuming alcohol or abstaining from it was a matter of personal choice and people believed that they should be given the right to make their choices and be responsible for their impact. Last but not least, there was serious criticism regarding the money that the Federal Treasury lost from the taxes that would have been imposed on alcohol and beverages.

Ultimately the Stock Market Crash in 1929 and the subsequent beginning of the Great Depression shifted both the public opinion and the authorities towards the repeal of the 18th Amendment. This came as pressing priority because people needed jobs and the government needed money, as a result repealing the 18th Amendment and making alcohol legal again would open up many new job opportunities for citizens and bring additional revenues from sales taxes for the government.⁵⁸ In 1933 the 21st Amendment, as announced in the proclamation by Frank Delano Roosevelt, repealed the 18th Amendment and put an end in the Prohibition era.

⁵⁶ Lerner, *Dry Manhattan*, p.11

⁵⁷ Stayton, William H. “The Official View of the Anti-Prohibition Association.” *Current History*, vol. 28, p.4

⁵⁸ Rosenberg, "The History of Prohibition ", [Accessed 18 Jul. 2022]

3. The Flappers and the female characters in “The Great Gatsby”.

By 1925 Fitzgerald had made for himself the reputation of the first chronicler of the twenties and the author who popularized the “flapper”, the female representative of the era.⁵⁹ The name “flappers” was given to the women of the twenties by their critics for the girls’ practice to wear their galoshes loose, allowing them to “flap” around their ankles⁶⁰. Though it would not be accurate to say that the flapper was created by Fitzgerald, it must be noted that he was the one who publicized the term along with what it stood for. For Fitzgerald as well as other authors of the lost generation, such as Hemingway, the flapper was a symbol of an era and as such this very deep term must not be misconstrued or oversimplified. In Fitzgerald’s mind the flappers were represented as the mere embodiment of the new philosophy of romantic individualism, autonomy, mature self-responsibility, and uniqueness⁶¹. At the same time the flappers were rebellious against male domination and patriarchy, which they clearly defied and last but not least these “new women” were liberated, self-centered, fun, loving and alluring.⁶²

Let us take the three main female characters of the Great Gatsby, Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson as iconic examples of flappers in the twenties. These liberated women drink, flirt, smoke, commit adultery and live their life to extremes, very contrary to the life women used to have in the eras preceding the 1920s. In the Victorian period women were expected to stay at home and devote themselves to their husbands and their children. The social stereotypes of this conservative era dictated that they should be the embodiment of virtues and qualities such as “*purity, piety and prudence*”, at the same time be submissive to men and of course be confined within their household.⁶³ Later on, at the end of the nineteenth

⁵⁹ Sanderson, Rena. “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction.” in Prigozy, Ruth ed. *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Ruth Prigozy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 143. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001.

⁶⁰ McNeese, *World War I*, p.87

⁶¹ Realo, Anu “Three Components of Individualism.” *European Journal of Personality*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2002, p. 163

⁶² Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 144

⁶³ Riley, Glenda. *Inventing the American Woman: An Inclusive History. To 1877*. Harlan Davidson, Inc., Wheeling (Illinois), 2007, p.152

century and the beginning of the twentieth the sprawl of slums around big cities, the spread of diseases as well as the economic depression brought about an impressive female public activity regarding issues of everyday life. When women began to get involved in the political and cultural life of the nation, they did so by applying the “*high morality*” that they were expected to show and promoted values such as temperance or fundamental women rights⁶⁴ . In this turbulent era between the 1890s and the 1920s, although significant change was brought about, stereotypes were deep and the majority of the public opinion as well as various male thinkers, for example D. H. Lawrence and Wyndham Lewis, blamed women for abandoning their traditional roles, those of the mother and wife, thus leading to the decline of the West ⁶⁵.

During the Great War, the First World War, men were either enlisted or drafted to serve in the army, thus contributing to the effort of the nation. The hundreds of thousands of men that left the country to join the forces of the United States left behind a vast number of empty employment posts subsequently women across the United States were told that it was their patriotic duty to work and support the American economy, so American women were presented with the unique opportunity to actively join workforce and become farmers, work in the manufacturing sector, they even work in the munition factories or shipyards and do traditionally male jobs ⁶⁶. Unfortunately, when the war was over the majority of these women either went back to a more “female job” or were forced to concede because it had to be ensured that the men who came back from the war would not be jobless.⁶⁷ By 1920, after the end of the war, there were 8.5 million women holding jobs outside their household in the United States, fewer than the number of working women in 1910.⁶⁸ Another notable event regarding women in the twenties is the fact that in 1916 Jeannette Rankin, a 36-year-old Republican from Missoula, Montana, became the first woman to be elected to the House of Representatives. Rankin, who was a suffragist and a great activist fought for women’s right to

⁶⁴ Riley, *Inventing the American Woman*, p. 153

⁶⁵ Carey, John. *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1880-1939*. Faber & Faber, London, 2012, pp.183-4

⁶⁶ McNeese, *World War I*, p.44

⁶⁷ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1058

⁶⁸ McNeese, *World War I*, p.44

vote to apply in all states.⁶⁹ The significant contribution of women during the war along with the efforts of a number of female activists led to a historical change in America; With the Nineteenth Amendment, white women were given the right to vote in 1920. Their enfranchisement was a revolutionary change and boosted the notion of the “new woman”, the flapper that was gallopingly gaining ground establishing “lifestyle feminism”⁷⁰ and promoting an active way of life very much affected by consumerism, advertising and the movies that encouraged a profoundly liberated female ideal.⁷¹

As the economy improved, the shift in the standards of living brought about revolutionary change in “*manners and morals*”⁷². The new technologies along with unprecedented urbanization and extreme class mobility, widely affordable goods and consumerism brought about a significant shift in the structure of the American society. All these groundbreaking changes along with the first World War and the subsequent post-war prosperity “glorified individual gratification instead of self-denial and social justice”⁷³. This shift on the personal and the individual had a significant impact on women and their role and representation in the American community. This emphasis on the self was first manifested with the Gibson Girl, the most immediate historical predecessor of the flapper. Created by Charles Dana Gibson, an illustrator for Life magazine, in 1896, the Gibson Girl was a beautiful young and attractive woman, who looked tanned, fit and slim, wholesome rather than sexual, self-fulfilling rather than dependent on male desires⁷⁴. While the Gibson Girl was shortly supplanted in the public imagination by the more sexualized flapper, who aimed at attracting men, both female types shared a refusal to conform to the stereotypes of the society who wanted them to abide by the female standards of the nurturing, maternal nature⁷⁵ as well as those of the pious, faithful and patient wife, daughter or mother who should be submissive

⁶⁹ McNeese, *World War I*, p.32

⁷⁰ Rapp, Rayna, and Ross, Ellen. "The 1920s: Feminism, Consumerism and Political Backlash in the United States." *Women in Culture and Politics: A Century of change*. Indiana University Press, 1986, p.58

⁷¹ Rapp and Ross, "The 1920s: Feminism, Consumerism and Political Backlash in the United States." pp.59-60

⁷² Friedman, Jean E, et al. *Our American Sisters: Women in American Life and Thought.*, D.C. Heath, Lexington, Mass., 1975, p.471

⁷³ Friedman, Jean E, et al., *Our American Sisters*, p.472

⁷⁴ Brown, Dorothy M. *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s*.Twayne, Boston, 1987, p. 30

⁷⁵ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 144

towards the established ideals of patriarchy. Noting this significant shift in moral authority stemming from the individual rather than the family and the community McGovern claims that the appearance of the flapper came as an aftermath of the social turmoil that preceded the twenties and the first world war ⁷⁶ and that flappers first appeared in the 1910s, before the United States entered the war and at some point, it was something that came naturally after the oppression that women had suffered for centuries.

Fitzgerald himself was rather ambivalent toward his "creation," fearing that the flapper was not the embodiment of freedom and joviality but that of lack of direction and moral anarchy instead. Not only did Fitzgerald use the flapper as a symbol of a new order and the virtual emblem of American modernity, but also as a symbol of social disorder and conflict. He was not satisfied by what he had created and in his *"Life in Letters"* Fitzgerald writes: *"If I had anything to do with creating the manners of the contemporary American girl, I certainly made a botch of the job"* ⁷⁷. Fitzgerald was both fascinated and disturbed by women and by the dramatic changes regarding how power was distributed and although for some he is the "spokesman for modern women"⁷⁸ for some others he is the author who condemns women for failing to live up to the male hero's romantic expectations due to their pragmatism and cynicism. ⁷⁹ His relation with his wife, Zelda stigmatized the way he formed female characters in his mind and the way he filtered the female modernism of the roaring twenties in his work. It is also very widely known that Fitzgerald drew a lot of material regarding the way he would represent women from his early family life with his wife.⁸⁰ Zelda, in her *"Collected Writings"*, wrote that *"plagiarism begins at home"*⁸¹ and she identified that Fitzgerald recognized the modern, young, American woman as a product of the social flux and of the fact that women during that *"turbulent epoch"* were so much pressurized.⁸² According to Zelda, Fitzgerald was a major male author who had the charisma to have deep insight into female psychology as well

⁷⁶ McGovern, James R. "The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals." *The Journal of American History*, vol. 55, no. 2, Sept. 1968, p. 428-29

⁷⁷ Baughman Judith, *F. Scott Fitzgerald A Life in Letters.*, Scribner's, New York & Toronto, 1994, p.110

⁷⁸ McCay, Mary A. "Fitzgerald's Women: Beyond Winter Dreams." *American Novelists Revisited: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (1983): 315.

⁷⁹ This could be the case for *Gatsby* and *Daisy* as well as for *Nick* and *Jordan*.

⁸⁰ Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's Fiction", p. 145

⁸¹ Fitzgerald, Zelda. *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 2013, p. 388

⁸² Fitzgerald, *The Collected Writings*, p. 709

as the social status and evolution of the American woman and perhaps the divided self that has been detected by readers and scholars alike might be the expression of an androgynous creativity, although this is something that Fitzgerald himself tried to “mask” as , throughout his life he was terrified of being identified as a homosexual and felt uneasiness regarding his sexuality and sexual performance.⁸³ Especially when it comes to “The Great Gatsby” and the way the female voice is presented, it must be noted that Fitzgerald uses the literary character of Nick Carraway to fascinatingly experiment with narrative and presents all the female characters through a central male consciousness⁸⁴, that of Nick as the narrator. With this choice Fitzgerald demonstrates that in this modern world the identity of each individual resides in how he or she is perceived by others and more specifically when it comes to female representation, women have no identity except in the eyes of their beholder.⁸⁵

In “The Great Gatsby” Fitzgerald attempts a full exploration of the modern woman’s symbolic significance in an era of disintegration. Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan along with other female characters such as Myrtle’s sister, Catherine and the women that attend Gatsby’s parties show the changes in women’s mores and behavior that Fitzgerald was so keen on observing and depicting in his literature. Thousands of women who read *The Great Gatsby* - or any other of the novels that Fitzgerald wrote- read about femmes fatales. According to Sanderson these women would read about “*golden girls, popular daughters or debutantes that adopted the deportment, the fashion, the ways, the attitude of the flappers and sprinkle the magic dust of their high spirits.*”⁸⁶ Women’s modernization was embedded in Fitzgerald’s characters and in his own view the significance of the flappers in his novels was that they “*were not a type – they were a generation. Free spirits evolved through the war chaos and a final inevitable escape from restraint and inhibitions*”⁸⁷ . He made the American flapper a female symbol that rose along with the new manners that sprang out of the era of the twenties, especially the rise of a new moneyed class in the American Midwest “*without background,*

⁸³ Froehlich, Maggie Gordon. "Jordan Baker, gender dissent, and homosexual passing in *The Great Gatsby*." *The Space Between* 6.1, 2010, p. 82.

⁸⁴ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 199

⁸⁵ Prigozy, Introduction: “Scott, Zelda, and the Culture of Celebrity”, p.33

⁸⁶ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 187

⁸⁷ Brucoli, Matthew J, et al. *F. Scott Fitzgerald in His Own Time: A Miscellany*. The Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio, 1971, p.279

tradition, or manners,” and the popularization of Sigmund Freud⁸⁸, whose ideas “*at third-hand*” convinced “*wealthy young girls*” that “*they were all victims of repressed desires*” and that they should “*cut loose*”⁸⁹.

Going back to the basic female characters of “The Great Gatsby”, it is astonishing that Fitzgerald himself thought that the novel “*contains no important woman character*”⁹⁰, however all three of them– but mostly - his central heroine Daisy Buchanan holds a prominent place within the American literary tradition⁹¹ and is featured as a literary character of dubious morality. Readers who are familiar with Fitzgerald’s fiction will immediately recognize Daisy being depicted as Fitzgerald’s golden girl⁹² and Myrtle Wilson as the lower-class woman who tries hard to become a member of the upper-class. Myrtle is also the type of character who is deeply sexualized contrary to Daisy who is idealized in the most romantic way. The third character that completes the female cast is Jordan Baker, an athlete, a champion golfer with a slim, boyish body and “*an erect carriage*” which she shows off “*like a young cadet*”⁹³, clearly alluding to her androgynous tendencies.⁹⁴

It is through the eyes of Nick Carraway that we get our first glimpse of Daisy and Jordan in the very first pages of the novel. The two airy figures -with a theatrical tendency that may reflect the influence of popular culture, especially Hollywood on women’s roles⁹⁵- impress Nick in their ethereal beauty and weightlessness. Their almost aerial representation is given an extra touch by the fluttering of their dresses and the curtains around them⁹⁶. Nick is also bewildered by the fact that they seem so pure in their white dresses and by the sense of joviality and positive energy around them and Daisy admits to be “*p- paralysed with happiness*”.⁹⁷ However, it seems that both women have secrets and especially Daisy seems to be hiding some insincerity that Nick notices after their first encounter. She seems to be hiding her true self

⁸⁸ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 145

⁸⁹ Bruccoli, Matthew J, et al. F. Scott Fitzgerald in His Own Time p.264-65

⁹⁰ Baughman, F. Scott Fitzgerald A Life in Letters, p.110

⁹¹ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 199

⁹² Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 199-200

⁹³ Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p.129

⁹⁴ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 200

⁹⁵ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 200

⁹⁶ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 200

⁹⁷ Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p.11

behind the cultivated public façade of the modern woman of the twenties who -in a scornful tone of voice- exclaims that she is “*sophisticated*”⁹⁸ and at the same time she admits that she is “*pretty cynical about everything*”⁹⁹. Daisy identifies a woman’s ideal identity; She is married to a wealthy macho man, Tom Buchanan and at a first glance her identity seems to be that of “a beautiful little fool”¹⁰⁰ and she adapts very easily in the disguise of “*agreeable female stupidity*”¹⁰¹ which was promoted by a flood of popular movies. Daisy, pretends to be the fool that she wants others to see and that is what she wishes for her daughter too “*I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool- that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool*”¹⁰². It is as if Daisy, along with all the other characters of the novel behave having specific “*scripts in mind*”¹⁰³. Although by the end of the novel Nick, who originally seems to be charmed by Daisy, resents her and feels that she is an impostor – along with Jordan and Myrtle - Daisy’s character is idealized by Gatsby and seems to be the illusion, the incarnation of beauty, unattainability and desirability¹⁰⁴. Eventually, Daisy’s love for Gatsby is “*a sham*”¹⁰⁵, very much idealized for him and coldly realistic for her who prefers to conspire with Tom rather than love Gatsby. After all what Daisy was just a woman whose “*voice was full of money*”¹⁰⁶ and that was part of her charm and the source of her cynicism. The mystique around her, the unattainable goal, “*the golden girl*”¹⁰⁷ for whom personal affairs meant business and love was immediately translated to money and personal interest. Her voice echoed with affluence and that – for Gatsby- was her inexhaustible charm. Last but not least Nick admits that Daisy is a “*nice*” girl with Michaels claiming that “*nice*” could in fact mean “*white*”, thus signifying that the focus of *The Great Gatsby* is about class but also about race in the postwar era¹⁰⁸. Color seems to be of the essence in Fitzgerald’s novel and especially when it comes to Daisy white – the color which

⁹⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.19

⁹⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.19

¹⁰⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.19

¹⁰¹ Berman, Ronald. *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*. University of Illinois Press, Chicago,1994, p.127

¹⁰² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.19

¹⁰³ Berman, *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*, p.113

¹⁰⁴ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 200

¹⁰⁵ Samuels, Charles Thomas. “The Greatness of” Gatsby”. *The Massachusetts Review* 7.4, 1966, p.787.

¹⁰⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.119

¹⁰⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.119

¹⁰⁸ Michaels, Walter Benn. *Our America: Nativism, modernism, and pluralism*. Duke University Press, Durham, 1995, p.27

is related exclusively to her- has a number of interpretations and connotations; Schneider explains that white which is *"traditionally the color of purity"* is used by Fitzgerald in an attempt to underscore the *"ironic disparity"* between Daisy's superficial *"purity"* and her *"actual corruption"*¹⁰⁹ . Additionally, Elmore – taking a further step- remarks that white "in both the Neoplatonic and Judeo-Christian traditions" ¹¹⁰symbolizes God or the One which resonates with Gatsby's idealization of Daisy as the one and only woman that differed so significantly from all others in Gatsby's mind.

Jordan Baker's identity, too, seems to be the product of popular media. From her very first appearance in the novel, Jordan gives the impression of a mysterious, alluring and aloof woman who belongs to the elite and has managed to become a famous golfer and establish herself as an athlete in a sport dominated by wealthy males. Nick instantly recognizes her face because he has seen her photo, and the last time they met she reminds him of *"a good illustration"*¹¹¹ and critics have argued that Nick uses *"conventionally masculine language"*¹¹² to describe Jordan and her body as boyish – *"hard", "muscular", "that of a young cadet"*¹¹³- and her *"conventionally masculine attributes"*¹¹⁴, such as the fact that she is athletic, confident and self-sufficient. Although she originally comes from somewhere in the Midwest, she finds her way in the east coast and manages to climb the social ladder very fast impersonating class mobility and the thirst of women in the twenties to stand out and have chances in their lives. Jordan is a dishonest and deceitful personality who distorts the truth in order to make sure that she is not found in a disadvantageous position ¹¹⁵ and Nick writes that *"Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply"*¹¹⁶ . Jordan's cynicism, the scorn she feels for others and her self-centeredness mark her as one of the *"new women"* of the Roaring Twenties¹¹⁷. Unlike Daisy, who is married and has a child, Jordan shows a new path for women. She is not the

¹⁰⁹ Schneider, Daniel J. "Color-Symbolism in The Great Gatsby." *University Review* 31 , 1964, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ Elmore, A. E. "Color and Cosmos in" The Great Gatsby"." *The Sewanee Review* 78.3, 1970, p. 430.

¹¹¹ Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p.141

¹¹² Froehlich, "Jordan Baker, gender dissent" p. 83

¹¹³ Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p.41

¹¹⁴ Froehlich, "Jordan Baker, gender dissent" p. 83

¹¹⁵ Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's Fiction", p. 200

¹¹⁶ Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby, p.47

¹¹⁷ Bloom, Harold, "Summary and Analysis" in Bloom, Harold ed. *F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby*. Infobase Publishing, New York, 2010, p.48

object of men's fantasy, romanticism and idealism, but she knows how to try hard in order to survive and achieve her goals being a pragmatist who takes decisions to her advantage at any given time.

Myrtle, the third main female character in the Great Gatsby that demonstrates features of the new woman of the twenties. She is desperate for a better life than the one she leads in a suffocating marriage with a destitute, uninteresting man, George Wilson whom she dominates and addresses to in scorn and disdain. According to Churchwell, Myrtle is a woman striving to climb the social ladder and escape from her prison, a garage in the valley of ashes a place of poverty and hopelessness between the roaring city of New York and the suburbs of West and East Egg¹¹⁸. Myrtle has the air of "*impressive hauteur*" who carries "*surplus flesh sensuously*" and her face "*contained no facet or gleam of beauty*"¹¹⁹. She is a "*social ladder climber*"¹²⁰ who tries to escape her difficult life by having an affair with Tom Buchanan and living a second, secret life with him in an apartment in Manhattan, where Myrtle pretends to be associated with high society- as she has come to know it through tabloids and movies¹²¹. Nick seems to despise of her vulgarity and the fact that she is a mockery of everything she aspires to imitate. This new woman of the twenties uses her sexuality, so as to climb the social ladder and live a better life next to Tom and she commits adultery for this reason. Nick, the omniscient narrator of the novel knows that Tom is never going to marry Myrtle and no matter how hard she tries she cannot replace Daisy either by wearing cream – not the usual blue-¹²² clothes or by shouting her name at the presence of guests in a decadent party in the apartment in Manhattan. In this party, the readers are also introduced to Catherine, Myrtle's sister, a typical flapper of the twenties a proprietary, possessive, acquisitive woman who seems to be the refined version of her sister¹²³. According to Bloom, her presence strikingly contrasts with that of Daisy Buchanan's; ¹²⁴ "*where Daisy is charm and illusion, lightness and façade, Myrtle Wilson*

¹¹⁸ Churchwell, *Careless people*, p.9

¹¹⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.26

¹²⁰ Churchwell, *Careless people*, p.9

¹²¹ Sanderson, "Women in Fitzgerald's Fiction", p. 200

¹²² Bloom, "Summary and Analysis", p.37

¹²³ Bloom, "Summary and Analysis", p.34

¹²⁴ Bloom, "Summary and Analysis", p.34

has “an immediately perceptible vitality about her as if the nerves of her body were continually smoldering.” Fitzgerald used the imagery of “the burning gardens” to underscore Myrtle’s sexuality and explain why Tom was attracted to this woman who was full of vitality. Myrtle’s sister Catherine is a more refined version of her sister.

Much of the criticism regarding Fitzgerald’s novel considers the roles of women and how they are portrayed in the book in comparison to the way men are presented. According to Bloom, much of the action of the novel which leads to strange, unruly and violent behavior by men is instigated by women either actively or passively ¹²⁵. Daisy is the woman behind Gatsby’s desire for life and his craving for fame and money. Nick is charmed by Jordan’s mysterious personality, before he changes his understanding and resent her for deceitfulness as well as the fact that she takes advantage of the people she encounters. Myrtle is the recipient of violent behavior from an outraged Tom, who hits her because she provokes him by shouting out loud Daisy’s name and most probably by her husband as well to whom she shouts “Beat me”, “Throw me down and hit me you little coward!”¹²⁶ a few moments before her tragic end. That’s not to say that women in the novel are not complete characters with actions and motivations all their own; Bloom remarks that all three female characters are most certainly very complicated and full of a variety of purposes and he stresses out that it was common place for Fitzgerald to write about women who inspire extreme behaviors in men.¹²⁷

Zelda Fitzgerald writes about the demise of the flappers as a philosophy. “Flapperdom”, she writes in her “Collected Writings” “has become a game; it is no longer a philosophy”¹²⁸. The “philosophy”, behind flapperdom was the thirst for life and the inherent need of women for individual rebellion against the stereotypical “pieties” and “restraints”¹²⁹ of the past. Stripped of the philosophical background behind this stance towards life, flapperdom became just fashionable, a “conformity to convention”¹³⁰ standing for exactly the opposite from what it had originally meant to resonate. The “new women” of the twenties as presented in detail by Scott

¹²⁵ Bloom, “Summary and Analysis”, p.37

¹²⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.136

¹²⁷ Bloom, “Summary and Analysis”, p.37

¹²⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Collected Writings of Zelda Fitzgerald*. p. 392

¹²⁹ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 145

¹³⁰ Sanderson, “Women in Fitzgerald’s Fiction”, p. 145

Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* became obsolete as the decade of the twenties drew was coming towards its end. The Great Depression that followed and the severity and intensity of the recess made the prosperity of the twenties as well as the flappers seem like a memory from the long gone past.

4. Nativism and the Twenties.

The Great Gatsby is a novel that shows the nation's unwillingness to productively integrate immigrants in the American society¹³¹ and reveals the extent to which "nativism"¹³² was deeply rooted in the conscience of Americans during the Twenties regarding "ethnic and religious identity" along with "class status and origins".

During the roaring twenties, the majority of the public opinion and the media strongly supported nativism and publicized theories of "Nordicism" as explained by Kenneth Roberts in his collection of articles entitled "Why Europe leaves home"¹³³. According to Roberts, the Nordic race was the one that constituted the foundation of the American nation and crossbreeding should not be allowed as it is expected to lead to "mongrelization".¹³⁴ Roberts also assumed that the influx of millions of "Alpine, Mediterranean and Semitic races" will unavoidably lead to a hybrid race of "worthless" and "futile" people.¹³⁵ These articles first appeared in the widely read newspaper of the time, the *Post* and resulted in the "Nordicism" becoming an increasingly popularized theory among Americans.

Between 1910 and 1917 millions of immigrants from Europe, namely Eastern-European countries and countries of the Mediterranean arrived in the United States of America in search of a promise land and the American society was at great pressure because of these "unassimilated immigrants" that "were washed in the American shores"¹³⁶. As early as 1919, Americans faced great turmoil that followed several attacks against immigrants – mainly Catholics and Jews- blending nativist and religious xenophobia¹³⁷. This upheaval that

¹³¹ Decker, Jeffrey Louis. "Gatsby's Pristine Dream: The Diminishment of the Self-Made Man in the Tribal Twenties." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1994, p. 52. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1345913>. Accessed 31 Jul. 2022

¹³² Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.52

¹³³ Roberts, Kenneth L. *Why Europe Leaves Home*, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1922, p.22

¹³⁴ Roberts, *Why Europe Leaves Home*, p.22

¹³⁵ Roberts, *Why Europe Leaves Home*, p.22

¹³⁶ Kennedy, David M. *Over here: The first world war and American society*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 49

¹³⁷ Higham, John. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. Atheneum, New York, 1963, p. 267

followed race riots and bombings on top of anti-Communist hysteria led more and more people from rural and underprivileged areas to turn to nativism and adhere to the traditional ways of life as opposed to the urban way of life and urban radicalism¹³⁸ .

One of the most important aspects of the twenties is that a significant number of male immigrants in their seeking for a way to make ends meet, turned to crime as a means to survive.¹³⁹ Several of them who were suspected to be radicalized were deported out of fear of the Attorney General, Alexander Palmer who had raised his voice against “*alien immigrants*”¹⁴⁰ . In the dawn of the new decade, the decade of the Roaring Twenties, nativism sprang out of the fact that people who were born Americans feared and despised of immigrants who were seen as posing a threat because of their connections with radicalized groups¹⁴¹ . American nativism was targeted at the millions of immigrants who found shelter in the United States within 1910 and 1917 without any significant quotas, restrictions and limitations and led to the passing of the Emergency Immigration Act in 1921, a legal framework that controlled and significantly limited the number of immigrants who arrived to the United States from European countries¹⁴² . According to this act only 3% of the foreigners belonging to a specific nationality already residing in the United States would be entitled to the right to have access to the U.S. The numbers were drawn from the 1910 and later from the 1890 census and the goal was to block mainly people from Easter and Southern Europe, the numbers of whom were minimal before 1900¹⁴³ . Astonishingly, Asians were altogether deprived of the right to legally migrate to the United States but this was not the case for people coming from other countries in North, Central or South America, thus the number of “Hispanics”, mainly people from Cuba, Mexico and Puerto Rico were increased.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Tindall and Shi, *America: A narrative history*, p. 1023

¹³⁹ Decker, “Gatsby's Pristine Dream”, p. 53

¹⁴⁰ McNeese, *World War I*, p.79

¹⁴¹ McNeese, *World War I*, p.81

¹⁴² Department of State, Office of the Historian. “The Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act).” *State.gov*, 2019, history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act.

¹⁴³ McNeese, *World War I*, p.81

¹⁴⁴ McNeese, *World War I*, p.81

A striking historical event that permeated the whole period of the twenties was the re-emergence of the Ku-Klux-Klan, an old organization dating back to the Civil War. The activity of the Ku-Klux-Klan was regionally restricted to the South¹⁴⁵ and it was known for terrorizing blacks who sought for enfranchisement and equal rights¹⁴⁶. The anti-immigrant sentiment of the Roaring Twenties fueled the re-emergence of the Klan with an emphasis on Blacks along with Roman Catholics, Jews and generally immigrants and foreigners of any kind. The Klan attracted groups of supporters who felt both threatened by the forceful presence of African Americans, Jews and Catholics – mainly Italians- and those who felt uneasy and uncomfortable with the social changes that took place in the American society at such a fast pace¹⁴⁷. Born back to life by William Simmons, a former Methodist minister, the Klan was supported by Americans all over the nation wearing the typical white robes with the pointed hoods that signified terror in the eyes of those who were persecuted. In an effort to keep their country “racially pure” and “morally straight”¹⁴⁸, the Klan members openly terrified people who belonged to the aforementioned groups even after 1924, when the second set of laws restricting immigration practically voiced and realized the Klan members’ demands.

This atmosphere is filtered in American literature of the time in great detail. According to Pekarofski, Walter Benn Michaels in his book “Our America: Nativism, Modernism and pluralism” writes that in terms of literary production this period “is marked by questions centered around national identity” and “can be seen as a response to the influx of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, whose ethnic otherness represented new challenges to a racially defined sense of nationality”¹⁴⁹. More specifically in *The Great Gatsby* Scott Fitzgerald attempts to outline the nativist climate of the period through Tom Buchanan, the macho, white American who expresses racist ideas along with xenophobia as well as the characters of Gatsby himself, Jew bootlegger and criminal Meyer Wolfsheim,

¹⁴⁵ Okrent, Daniel. *Last call: The rise and fall of prohibition*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 2010, p.244

¹⁴⁶ McNeese, *World War I*, p.87

¹⁴⁷ Goldberg, David J. "Rethinking the 1920s: Historians and Changing Perspectives." *OAH Magazine of History* 21.3, 2007, p. 8

¹⁴⁸ McNeese, *World War I*, p.87

¹⁴⁹ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.55

Michaelis- a restaurant owner of Greek origin, the Finnish clean lady who helps Nick Carraway and the black people who, although silent for the most part¹⁵⁰, provide the plot with essential input.

The way Decker puts it, *The Great Gatsby's* passage provides a reflection on contemporary American attitudes towards immigration policy, "*staging a national anxiety about the loss of white Anglo-Saxon supremacy in the Twenties*"¹⁵¹. Lothrop Stoddard with "*The Rising Tide of Colour Against White World- Supremacy*", which was published in 1920 seems to have been the model for "*The Rise of the Coloured Empires*"¹⁵², a book written by the white supremacist Goddard" that made such a great impression on Tom Buchanan.¹⁵³ Tom asserts that he belongs to the Nordic race, along with Nick and Daisy, of course, and he believes that their culture is the cradle of the civilization and all the things that helped humanity shine through the centuries "*science and art, and all that*"¹⁵⁴. He also explains that if white people are not extremely cautious, the white race is in danger of being submerged by the influx of all those who lack purity. Fitzgerald seems to criticize theories of nativism presented in an overgeneralized way and condensed in the phrase "*It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved*"¹⁵⁵, however back in the time when the novel was written such ideas were voiced by a significant number of influential Americans who shared an enthusiasm regarding eugenics and a need to restrict immigration¹⁵⁶, which helped shape political views and became widespread through the press and literature of the period.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ Brown, Caroline. "What Nicks' Careless Laughter Both Reveals and Obscures-Reading Race in F. Scott Fitzgeralds' *The Great Gatsby*." *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice* 2.4 (2004): 46.

¹⁵¹ Decker, "Gatsby's Pristine Dream", p. 52

¹⁵² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.15

¹⁵³ Churchwell, *Careless people* p.260

¹⁵⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.16

¹⁵⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.15

¹⁵⁶ Jacoby Jeff, "A Century Ago, the Science Was Settled: Immigrants Had to Be Kept out - the Boston Globe." *BostonGlobe.com*, www.bostonglobe.com/2019/11/08/opinion/century-ago-science-was-settled-immigrants-had-be-kept-out/. Accessed 3 Aug. 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.52

*"The Great Replacement Theory"*¹⁵⁸ that is resonated in *The Great Gatsby* through the words of Tom claims a fear which was very popular among those who feared the "otherness"¹⁵⁹, the mere fact that the immigrants as well as the Blacks were responsible for all the ills and the decadence of the American society. Racial purity seems to have been a key factor to the *"White Supremacy Theory"*¹⁶⁰ as expressed by Tom who fears that people *"will throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white"*. Tom's ideas regarding *"miscegenation"* are voiced at a crucial point of the novel; When Gatsby reveals his affair with Daisy, Tom is not only afraid of the fact that he might lose his wife to another man but also that this man, Gatsby, was vaguely perceived to belong to another class and to another race¹⁶¹, without any concrete proof. Gatsby's true identity and origins has recently been a source of debate with scholars suggesting that he was *"the worst kind of outsider"*¹⁶² whose sole aim was to mar Daisy's purity¹⁶³ and others suggesting that he could have been of Jewish origin¹⁶⁴, which could explain his easy access to the bootlegging business with the Jew Wolfsheim right after the war. Decker also notes that Gatsby's original surname, "Gatz" could potentially allude to Jewish origin, which along with his complexion, which was not white, according to Tom could potentially give further ground to the hypothesis of Gatsby's Jew origin, although there is serious disagreement among scholars who do and do not think that this is plausible¹⁶⁵. According to Slater, the chances of Gatsby being a Jew are very slim, as both his real surname, Gatz as well as his father's Lutheran faith might show that his origin is German¹⁶⁶. Slater claims that *"In a curious way, however, Gatsby possesses no ethnicity of any sort, being a product of his own dreams and*

¹⁵⁸ Misra, Tanvi. "The "Great Replacement Theory" Was Never "Fringe."" *Harper's BAZAAR*, 18 May 2022, www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/politics/a40036822/the-great-replacement-theory-america/ [Accessed 3 August, 2022]

¹⁵⁹ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.55

¹⁶⁰ Schreier, Benjamin. "Desire's Second Act:" Race" and" The Great Gatsby's": Cynical Americanism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53.2 ,2007, p. 160

¹⁶¹ Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, modernism, and pluralism*, p.18

¹⁶² Washington, Bryan R. *The Politics of Exile: Ideology in Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James Baldwin*. Upne, New Hampshire, 1995, p.45

¹⁶³ Schreier, "Desire's Second Act" p.158

¹⁶⁴ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.54

¹⁶⁵ Pekarofski, "The Passing of Jay Gatsby", p.58

¹⁶⁶ Slater, Peter Gregg. "Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1973, p. 58 JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/440797>. Accessed 6 Aug. 2022.

*conceits*¹⁶⁷ and as Fitzgerald writes: “the truth is that “Jay Gatsby sprung from the Platonic conception of himself”¹⁶⁸.

Wolfsheim’s image in the novel is one of the most complex regarding the thorny issue of ethnicity¹⁶⁹. Meyer Wolfsheim, the Jew criminal with whom Gatsby does business is a character who has deliberately been “*distorted*” into an exaggerated, anti-semitic depiction of a “*squat, repulsive foreigner*” the stereotypical Jewish criminal ¹⁷⁰ who is both physically and morally despised of. Wolfsheim is described as a caricature “*a small, flat-nosed Jew*” with a “*large head*” and “*two fine growths of hair which luxuriated in either nostril*”¹⁷¹. Wolfsheim’s degenerating, stereotypical description of the gross Jew crook with the “*tragic nose*” through the eyes of Nick Carraway is “*colored by racial nativism*”¹⁷² and even the way he speaks English is mocked by Nick who emphasizes on Wolfsheim’s mispronouncing of several words such as “*gonnections*” and “*Oggsford*”¹⁷³. All the aforementioned characteristics make Wolfsheim sound and seem both exotic and sinister at the same time¹⁷⁴. His sinisterness is further enhanced by the cufflinks “*made of the finest specimens of human molars*”¹⁷⁵.

The stereotypical way in which Wolfsheim is represented underscores a striking juxtaposition between the “*vigorous, Anglo- Saxon*”¹⁷⁶, Tom Buchanan and the degraded, corrupted Jew who is represented as a caricature. Tom on the one hand personifies virility, purity and all the virtues of an American with Nordic descendance, while Wolfsheim on the other hand is the repulsive, gross Jew who is entangled in illicit activities. Wolfsheim’s illegal activities emphasize on the common belief among Americans in the twenties that immigrants were directly connected to criminal activities and worked towards degrading

¹⁶⁷ Slater, “Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby.” p. 58

¹⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.118

¹⁶⁹ Slater, “Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby.” p. 58

¹⁷⁰ Rubin, Rachel. *Jewish Gangsters of Modern Literature*. University of Illinois Press, Champaign, 2000, p.83

¹⁷¹Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

¹⁷² Decker, “Gatsby’s Pristine Dream” p. 54

¹⁷³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.71-72

¹⁷⁴ Slater, “Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby.” p. 58

¹⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.85

¹⁷⁶ Decker, “Gatsby’s Pristine Dream” p. 54

and decompose the American society, thus several scholars argue that the Temperance movement along with the 18th amendment and the Prohibition during the Twenties can be seen as a very clear response of the nativist reflexes of the American society against the almost fourteen millions of immigrants- mainly Jews, Italians and Poles- who flooded the American states and caused the reaction of Americans who aimed at cleansing their land from hostile aliens.¹⁷⁷

The Finn lady that cleans Nick's place is also a minor silent character which stereotypically presents immigrant women from Europe to offer this kind of services to well-off American people. Nick refers to her as "my Finn" as if she were an inanimate possession over which he had rights of property and he does not even mention her name either because it is too insignificant to bother or because of scorn stemming from his awareness of the fact that he is found in an advantageous point belonging in the upper-middle class. The Finnish house keeper, who is "*reproachfully*"¹⁷⁸ looked at by the newly rich Gatsby, is a stereotypically presented woman who tells the story of millions of women like her, back in the twenties, when they had to struggle to make ends meet and survive in a new land full of mistrust and suspicion against immigrants. Immigrant women, as opposed to the flappers of the roaring twenties, were not liberated and were not given the opportunity to be assimilated to the American society, quite the opposite; they were nameless, almost invisible as Nick's "*Finn*" who "mumbles in her strange language". The Finnish servant lives "*among soggy, whitewashed alleys...*"¹⁷⁹ where Nick looked for her when he needed her.

Michealis is another very interesting peripheral character in "The Great Gatsby". He is a young Greek immigrant who runs a coffee shop in the ash heaps very close to George Wilson's garage. Stereotypically, the immigrant Michealis is presented to live in the underprivileged place between the West and East Egg, on the one hand, and New York, on the other. This character is a juxtaposition to the character of Wolfsheim; He is the kind of

¹⁷⁷ Lender, Mark Edward, and James Kirby Martin. *Drinking in America: A history*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987, p.93

¹⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.84

¹⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.91

immigrant who is really hard working and who has made the effort to run a small legal business. Michaelis Mavromichaelis, as opposed to Meyer Wolfsheim is the kind of person who is not influential, and who does not make use of illicit activities to make himself a fortune. He seems to be the only compassionate character, the one who stands by George Wilson after Myrtle's death. He was an eyewitness to her tragic death and although he was not sure of the color of the car his credibility was not doubted by the policeman who most explicitly said that Michaelis was "the principal witness at this inquest"¹⁸⁰. His testimony is not doubted by anybody, because Michaelis, albeit he as an immigrant, he was a businessman, paying taxes to the United States of America and most importantly, he does not seem to take part in any kind of illegal activity regarding alcohol, which is another juxtaposition between Michaelis and most of "The Great Gatsby" characters.

Last but not least, the very few Black people and the way they are presented in the novel must be analyzed. Some of the black people in the novel enjoy "*a superficial affluence*"¹⁸¹. The three "modish negroes"¹⁸² that Nick describes when he passes the Queensboro Bridge along with Gatsby in his cream-colored car are the passengers of a limousine driven by a white chauffer. This rare sight of the Black men enjoying the services of a White is not ignored by Nick who, upon reflecting on what he had just witnessed, thought that "Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge, anything at all"¹⁸³. Literally this could mean that now that they have crossed the Queensboro Bridge and they are in the heart of New York, everything is possible. Metaphorically though, Nick's reference to sliding over the bridge could be an allusion to the turmoil of the roaring twenties and the fact that stereotypes of class, race and ethnicity were being overturned and the new social standards would allow a White old-American to be in the service of Black men. Nick uses the term "*bucks*"¹⁸⁴ for the three men, a demeaning word for a male animal¹⁸⁵ and says that the woman who was with them was "*ludicrous*"¹⁸⁶. The only other

¹⁸⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.137

¹⁸¹ Slater, "Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby." p. 55

¹⁸² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

¹⁸³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

¹⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

¹⁸⁵ Slater, "Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby." p. 55

Black character in the novel is a "a pale well-dressed negro" ¹⁸⁷ the name of whom we never learn. This man offers key information regarding the color of the car that hit Myrtle and led her to her tragic death. The words that Fitzgerald chose do not give the impression of a destitute, vagrant Black from the South. Instead, he is "well-dressed", which shows that he puts effort to ascend to an upper class. The fact that he is pale also enhances Nick's favorable impression on the Black witness, because Nick in his "*white American mind*"¹⁸⁸ bases his evaluations regarding people "*not only on their "socio-economic status" but also on physical distinctions and mannerisms*" ¹⁸⁹.

¹⁸⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

¹⁸⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

¹⁸⁸ Slater, "Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*." p. 55

¹⁸⁹ Slater, "Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*." p. 55

5. Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby and the Jazz Age.

During the 1920s in the United States, Jazz became a synonym of the roaring decade and according to Savran *"For the makers, consumers, and arbiters of culture, jazz was everything. A weltanschauung, a personal identity, a metaphysics, an epistemology, an ethics, an eros, a mode of sociality—an entire way of being."*¹⁹⁰ It was by all means an art genre that deeply exposed the differences between races and classes and at the same time expressed the cultural predispositions and competences of the American society. Jazz became the symbol of *"a modernist revolt"*¹⁹¹ which underpinned the unparalleled economic and social change that took place during the twenties and that is why it is impossible to talk about jazz simply as an artistic movement without associating it with all the social ramifications with which it was entangled; from speakeasies and illegal liquor consumption to flappers and immigrants. It was, according to Goldberg and Jablonski, the vulgar kind of music that was considered as a passing *"fad"* that was certainly not expected to last long and it was faced with contempt because it came from the *"slums of music"* and *"corrupted taste and manners"*¹⁹².

Ragtime music was a very famous musical genre that constituted the predecessor of jazz which first appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. This new music genre, which has originally called "jass" had both African and European influences and according to Kenney, *"American Jazz, in its early search for a home, passed through the world of Afro-American vaudeville and musical theater"*¹⁹³. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and most of it came from New Orleans home of one of the forerunners of jazz music, Jelly Roll Morton (originally known as Ferdinand Pechet)¹⁹⁴. In the years immediately after the first World War, the formerly vaudevillian orchestrations which were attended exclusively by black people were called "jazz" or "novelty music" and a number of black artists transformed it into a

¹⁹⁰ Savran, David. "The Search for America's Soul: Theatre in the Jazz Age." *Theatre Journal*, 2006, p. 459

¹⁹¹ Savran, "The Search for America's Soul", p. 459

¹⁹² Goldberg, Isaac, and Edward Jablonski. *Tin Pan Alley: A chronicle of American popular music*. Vol. 1111. New York, F. Ungar Publishing Company, 1961, p. 259

¹⁹³ Kenney III, William Howland. "The influence of Black vaudeville on early jazz." *The Black Perspective in Music*, 1986, p. 233.

¹⁹⁴ McNeese, World War I, p.84

more “coherent” musical form¹⁹⁵. By 1920 jazz had become the most prevalent musical style across the United States, performed exclusively by black artists at first. Although amateurish in terms of orchestration when compared to the well-established classical music of the time, jazz soon became rather complex in the sense that it was the music genre that expressed modernism and defiance towards the old status quo rejecting the traditional norms of classical music ¹⁹⁶. Another interesting feature regarding jazz was that it was the type of music that people from both upper and lower classes could listen to¹⁹⁷, thus this groundbreaking music genre went beyond class segregation, which was so divisive among Americans at the time.

The very popular music style that originated from New Orleans moved northwards, along the Mississippi River in Memphis and St. Louis¹⁹⁸, where Black communities thrived. Then it expanded to Kansas City, Chicago and New York, where Jazz was performed in the very famous Harlem jazz clubs with illicit liquor flowing, albeit the Prohibition of the time. Harlem had the largest Black population of the East coast metropolis and it was considered to be the cradle of jazz. The Cotton Club, the name of which clearly alludes to the cotton plantations of the South, was the most fashionable jazz spot serving mostly elite white clientele and featuring black artists such as Cab Calloway and Edward K. “Duke” Ellington ¹⁹⁹ . After it became so increasingly popular among Americans, mainly because it expressed the modernist way of life, jazz was also performed by white artists. For Americans belonging in the supreme white race, the fact that jazz music- which originated from the womb of the African culture- was so widely accepted by white people was nothing but an impure “*miscegenation*” and “*the triumph of the black over the white*” ²⁰⁰. This minority of White Americans turned against jazz music in the most profound way with critics writing an array of vitriolic articles with the characteristic headings “Unspeakable Jazz Must Go”, “Why ‘Jazz’ Sends Us Back to the Jungle” aiming at

¹⁹⁵ Bellot, Gabrielle. “What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age | JSTOR Daily.” JSTOR Daily, 8 May 2019, [daily.jstor.org/what-the-great-gatsby-reveals-about-the-jazz-age/](https://www.jstor.org/what-the-great-gatsby-reveals-about-the-jazz-age/). [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

¹⁹⁶ Bellot, “What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age” [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

¹⁹⁷ Bellot, “What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age” [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

¹⁹⁸ McNeese, *World War I*, p.84

¹⁹⁹ McNeese, *World War I*, p.84

²⁰⁰ Goldberg and Jablonski, “Tin Pan Alley”, p. 259

demeaning African-Americans by attacking to the music²⁰¹, the vilification of which directly or indirectly led to racial bigotry against black people ²⁰².

When Scott Fitzgerald died in 1940, he was reputed as “the best chronicler of a short and parochial chapter in American history who dramatized an American state of mind, wild and reckless” ²⁰³. Ever since F. Scott Fitzgerald published his collection, “Tales of the Jazz Age” , his name and his work has been inextricably linked to jazz ²⁰⁴. In fact, Fitzgerald seems to be the author who best coined the “Jazz Age” and in his own words he describes this era as one that “was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire”²⁰⁵. The way it was depicted in Fitzgerald’s works gave an immense boost to its popularity, especially in *The Great Gatsby* a novel in which the “Jazz Age” found its most iconic representation and was eventually fossilized in both academic and pop culture as a synonym of the 1920s.²⁰⁶ Fitzgerald was the writer who promoted and embraced jazz music like no other and this stance can be interpreted as a critique against all the racist theories of the time, additionally he glorified this new style of music in novels like *The Great Gatsby*, in which jazz is omnipresent, thus rejecting the hostility of several white writers against African Americans²⁰⁷. *The Great Gatsby* was, and still is, the quintessential novel when it comes to the “Jazz Age” its “romanticism” and “surface allure”²⁰⁸. The word jazz may not be extensively used in *The Great Gatsby*, however jazz music is dominant throughout the novel when horns, pianos and saxophones, very characteristic musical instruments of the genre, played by black people are practically audible in the background of most scenes of the novel. In fact, the extent to which jazz is prevalent in the novel has mandated that all cinematic adaptations of the novel make

²⁰¹ Anderson, Maureen. "The white reception of Jazz in America." *African American Review* 38.1, 2004, p. 135

²⁰² Bellot, "What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

²⁰³ Bryer, Jackson R. "The critical reputation of F. Scott Fitzgerald." In *The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, edited by Ruth Prigozy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p. 210.

²⁰⁴ Bellot, "What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age" [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

²⁰⁵ Fitzgerald F. Scott, "Echoes of the Jazz Age (1931)" *My Lost City: Personal Essays, 1920–1940*. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Ed. James L. W. West. Cambridge UP, New York, 2005, p. 131

²⁰⁶ Bellot, "What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age" [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

²⁰⁷ Anderson, "The white reception of Jazz in America.", p. 135

²⁰⁸ Henderson, A. (2013). *What the Great Gatsby Got Right about the Jazz Age*. [online] Smithsonian. Available at: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/what-the-great-gatsby-got-right-about-the-jazz-age-57645443/> [Accessed on 19 August, 2022].

extensive use of jazz orchestras playing in the background ²⁰⁹ . The novel is so inextricably linked to jazz music that scholars such as Kunce and Levitt argue that the novel is unconsciously “*patterned after the vaudeville shows*”, so closely related to jazz, and it is this structure that allows Fitzgerald to blend theatrical and literary parts in his novel in such a unique way in order to “elucidate” a variety of different themes very characteristic of the Roaring Twenties²¹⁰ .

It must be noted, though, that black people, who are so closely associated to jazz music, do not play a major role in Fitzgerald’s work. In fact, in the *Great Gatsby* black men – let alone black women- count very limited references in the whole novel and to some extent they go unnoticed and it is striking that the profound linking between jazz music and the black community is not evident in the novel. The choice of the word “bucks”, as black people are referred to in the novel ²¹¹, a clear allusion to male animals, might satisfy some of the readers - who might as well be white supremacists. In the event of the “three modish Negroes” and the black woman who ride the car crossing Queensboro Bridge are presented like caricatures “with the yolks of their eyeballs” rolling in “haughty rivalry” ²¹² . In the novel there is no reference to the great jazz artists of the time, the men and women who managed to change the musical style of the twenties in such a radical and unique way.

It is claimed that although Fitzgerald’s representation of the Black’s was rather limited and partial, the writer did not share the point of view of the majority of his white readers ²¹³, however there was this frail balance between what he believed and what the readers would approve of. So, Fitzgerald decided to write an ode to the greatness of jazz music, without referring to its historical background and its roots, thus presenting it in a way that would be acceptable by the majority of the people who would spend money and time on *The Great Gatsby*. In the light of this argument, the jazz background of the novel could be the “fad” of the twenties but at the same time the jazz music in the background of the lavish great parties in the *Gatsby* mansion could be a statement from Fitzgerald’s part regarding those who made it what

²⁰⁹ Bellot, “What the *Great Gatsby* Reveals about the Jazz Age [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

²¹⁰ Kunce, Catherine, and Paul M. Levitt. “The Structure of “*Gatsby*”: A Vaudeville Show, Featuring Buffalo Bill and a Cast of Dozens.” *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 4, 2005, p.101

²¹¹ See, here, p.37

²¹² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.69

²¹³ Margolies, Alan. “The Maturing of F. Scott Fitzgerald.” *Twentieth Century Literature* 43.1 , 1997, p.101

it is; African Americans²¹⁴. On the other hand, the fact that he made use of “jazz imagery” is argued to have shown that he most certainly “embraced the new music”, yet he was not as willing to accept its “practitioners and progenitors”²¹⁵. Although it is not arguable that Fitzgerald made an extensive use of Jazz in his works and he seemed to grasp the thirst of the American society for the new music genre that was accepted with increased fascination, the novelist did not seem ready to accept the origins of this music and attribute black people with the respect that he held for white Americans and Europeans. After all, as Vogel argues that “White interest in black art, entertainment, and culture in the Jazz Age, then, was often grounded in primitivism, voyeurism, and exploitation”, however it must be noted that it also “revealed a general dissatisfaction with the stale and inhibiting logic and aesthetics of white European culture” - what Tom Buchanan would call “civilization”.²¹⁶ The great parties that were so much enjoyed by the guests in the Gatsby mansion offered the attendants a temporary sense of freedom; some time away from the conservatism that was dictated by the white values. The white jazz listeners were thrilled and excited by the thirst for life and the passion fueled by this unique music genre originated from the depths of the African-American culture.

The Great Gatsby, so inextricably linked to jazz, along with the total of Fitzgerald’s oeuvre helped solidify this new music genre in the conscience of Americans and made it iconic at the same time. Readers became familiar with jazz music and it could be argued that Fitzgerald’s work boosted the proliferation of jazz music and -to some extent- curbed the very hostile reactions against it.

²¹⁴ Margolies, "The Maturing of F. Scott Fitzgerald.", p.102

²¹⁵ Bellot, "What the Great Gatsby Reveals about the Jazz Age [Accessed on 14 August, 2022].

²¹⁶ Vogel, Joseph. "'Civilization's Going to Pieces': The Great Gatsby, Identity, and Race, From the Jazz Age to the Obama Era." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 13.1, 2015, p. 47.

6. Automobiles in the 20s and the symbol of Cars in Gatsby.

The 1920s produced many technological innovations and advancements, however it was the advent of the automobiles that changed the face of American society. Cars were not invented in the 1920s, but it was then when they became very widely used and very easily affordable to everyone; In a matter of years, right after the first world war, when people had experienced all the ills of an unprecedented conflict, car ownership became a symbol of progress and prosperity and was inextricably linked to someone's social status.

In the 1920s Henry Ford, a pioneer in automobile entrepreneurship created assembly lines that could massively produce millions of automobiles at such a low cost that almost everyone in America could have one²¹⁷. In the 1920s a Model-T Ford would typically cost \$300 and by 1930, Ford as well as other automobile companies in the United States had already created a gallopingly growing industry which provided jobs for 4 million people²¹⁸, thus adding significantly to the American economy. The millions of cars that were sold in the decade after the first World War cluttered the streets of American urban areas and forced the construction of big highways along with a more dependable road system, while at the same time owning a car became a fad because the car was the new means of transport that signified modernism and resonated with the demands of the American society in the 1920s. Cars changed life in the United States and in some cases, given the fact that the distances in the United States were – and still are- very long, driving revolutionized transportation and trade across this vast country.

It goes without saying that such an important trend in the United States during the 1920s would be filtered in Fitzgerald's literary production and especially in *The Great Gatsby*. So as to begin fathom the automobile leitmotiv in *The Great Gatsby* we need to admit that automobiles serve as symbols²¹⁹ and as Malcolm Cowley remarks, "the characters are visibly represented by the cars they drive"²²⁰. First and foremost, the reader should emphasize on

²¹⁷ McNeese, *World War I*, p.114

²¹⁸ McNeese, *World War I*, p.114

²¹⁹ Seiters, Dan. *Image patterns in the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Diss. Southern Illinois University, Department of English, 1976, p. 58

²²⁰ Cowley, Malcolm. *Three Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953, p.35

Gatsby's car with its grandeur and lavishness and of course with its "rich cream color"²²¹, which according to Seiters is the result of the "combination of the white of the dream [Gatsby's] and the yellow of money, of reality in a narrow sense"²²². It is this very car that mirrors Gatsby's clinging on materialism and the insatiable crave for goods that corrupts Jay and stems from his need to win the love of Daisy by dazzling her with wealth and material objects²²³. Although Fitzgerald describes the car as creamy, as stated before, after Gatsby's car hits Myrtle it is only referred to as "yellow"²²⁴. Yellow works as a symbol of wealth, as it is the one that has the closest proximity to gold a symbol of the mythical riches of Gatsby, but also as a symbol of corruption because white, the color of dream and purity is no longer a part of the mixture²²⁵. Gatsby seeks to advertise his new socioeconomic status and gives the impression of a "nouveau riche of West Egg"²²⁶ and his choice of such a loud car as a way to make his presence so ostentatious must have been the outcome of an adolescence spent in hardships and poverty²²⁷.

George Wilson serves as the exact opposite compared to Gatsby when it comes to car ownership and socio-economic status. Wilson is a character who lacks the shine of Gatsby or the Buchanans and is emotionally and psychologically buried under the burden of the gloomy reality in the valley of ashes. This despondent, lifeless man owns a run-down vehicle, "a dust-covered wreck of a Ford"²²⁸ and although he owns a garage, Wilson is unable to fix his own car as he is unable to fix his marital life with Myrtle as well as his own life physically, economically and emotionally²²⁹. His wife, Myrtle deplores because she does not own a car which she would use as a means to climb the social ladder. Since she has no means to buy an automobile, she chooses to take a taxi ride on her way to the city, just to give the false impression of a social status much higher than her actual one.

²²¹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.68

²²² Seiters, *Image patterns*, p. 58

²²³ Lance, Jacqueline. "The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction with the rich and careless at the Wheel." *Studies in Popular Culture* 23.2, 2000, p.26.

²²⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 148

²²⁵ Seiters, *Image patterns*, p. 58

²²⁶ Lance "The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction." p.26

²²⁷ Seiters, *Image patterns*, p. 58

²²⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 29

²²⁹ Lance "The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction." p.27

Contrary to the Wilsons, the Buchanans own two cars; Tom drove a blue coupe and Daisy a "little white roadster"²³⁰, since her adolescence. Regarding Daisy, her gender does not inhibit her from owning a car and driving; this could be attributed partly to the fact that she came from a well-off family in Chicago and partly to the social characteristic of the liberated new woman who would drink, smoke, flirt and of course drive. The Buchanans' cars are not described thoroughly by Fitzgerald, he merely provides information regarding the color; blue for Tom and White for Daisy, probably because the rich couple was an established part of the local elite and the extraneous references to car ownership would not add anything to how they were perceived as being rich. The way Lance puts it "*they are comfortable with their wealth and social position and do not need to advertise their status by driving gaudy and showy automobiles.*"²³¹ Nick Carraway owns "an old Dodge"²³², a modest but decent car which matches Nick's struggling to make ends meet in a new career in "the bond business"²³³ and when it comes to Jordan Baker, it is unclear whether she owns a car or not.

Lance, remarks that the way the characters of *The Great Gatsby* "behave behind the wheel, strongly indicates their attitude towards life and relationships"²³⁴. Careless and irresponsible drivers harm others and they cause pain and injury to people and property, so unreliable drivers are also unreliable and volatile characters, coming back to the inextricable bond between cars and the *Gatsby* characters. Starting with Jordan Baker, Nick gives an account of her as a person that would lie very easily, as she did when she had forgotten a borrowed car out in the rain with the top down and as she did to win a golf match²³⁵. She is an unemotional deceitful and irresponsible person who unsurprisingly- cannot be trusted to drive. Tom is another careless character both in life and behind the wheel²³⁶. Jordan tells Nick a story about Tom who, soon after his marriage with Daisy "*ran into a wagon on the Ventura Road one night and ripped a front wheel off his car*"²³⁷ while being accompanied by "*one of the*

²³⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 79

²³¹ Lance "*The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction.*" p.27

²³² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 8

²³³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 7

²³⁴ Lance "*The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction.*" p.28

²³⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 62

²³⁶ Lance "*The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction.*" p.28

²³⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 82

chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel"²³⁸. Daisy is the most careless of all drivers in the novel as she is the one who kills Myrtle Wilson while driving a car after her affair with Gatsby is revealed in the Plaza Hotel. The fact that she killed Myrtle, along with the fact that she never took responsibility for her actions, unveil Daisy's character from the façade of the idealized, frail, angelic creature presented by Gatsby. Daisy hit Myrtle and abandoned her and then evaded all the repercussions of her actions hiding behind Gatsby's overprotection and Tom's conspiring schemes, however Myrtle was not Daisy's only victim; Gatsby himself would also be killed by George Wilson who was passed by Tom the misinformation that Gatsby, the ostentatious owner of the yellow car, was the one who killed his wife.

Materialism and carelessness, though, are not the only themes that are linked to automobiles in the *Great Gatsby*; Strangely, death is also associated with cars. When Daisy asked about the impact of her absence in Chicago, Nick answered with a hyperbole using a funeral scene²³⁹ saying that "All the cars have the left rear wheel painted black as a mourning wreath" ²⁴⁰. Additionally, Nick's description of a funeral passing during one of his trips with Gatsby to New York ²⁴¹may prepare the reader for Myrtle's hit and run accident and for Gatsby's tragical fate. Last but not least, the culmination of how death and the cars in *Great Gatsby* interwind comes when Gatsby's yellow car, "the death car"²⁴², kills Myrtle. It is the same yellow car that both George and Myrtle had noticed before when Tom, Nick and Jordan were heading to the city so as for Tom to face his rival, Gatsby. The car that kills Myrtle is the same, but the driver is not; Tom had asked Gatsby to swap their cars on their way to New York and if we accept that cars are seen as extensions of characters in *The Great Gatsby*, we can assume that Tom wanted to put himself into Gatsby's place - even by driving his car- so as to be able to confront him later on. On their way back though, when Tom felt more in control of the situation, he insisted that each driver should take his own car. Daisy's reckless driving transformed Gatsby's luxurious car into a death car, thus linking Daisy to death in the eyes of

²³⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 82

²³⁹ Lance "*The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction.*" p.29

²⁴⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 14

²⁴¹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 14

²⁴² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 137

the reader, even if she tried to conceal her deed by hiding behind her social class, letting Gatsby pay for what she did ²⁴³.

So far, it becomes obvious that America's favorite means of transportation is associated by Fitzgerald with negative connotations; consumerism, carelessness and eventually death. Why is it that Fitzgerald presented automobiles in such an ambivalent way? The answer could go back to the fact that industrialization was not necessarily perceived as something positive by Americans. According to Marx, there is a recurring pattern of Americans longing for a pastoral, rural literary setting in which they could seek for a safe haven without the effects of urbanization that terrified those who could not keep up with the so radical changes in the society and in their way of lives. Marx remarks that, the natural world, or "*garden*", in *The Great Gatsby* is a "*hideous, man-made wilderness*" ²⁴⁴ and that everything stems from the technological power that enables Gatsby to live in affluence. All his wealth perishes in the end and the car becomes synonym to death killing Myrtle and leading to Gatsby's death. "*The car and the valley of ashes*", Marx writes, "*belong to a world [...] where natural objects are of no value in themselves and the machine represents the forces working against pastoral fulfillment*"²⁴⁵. In essence technology could be paralleled to the apple that condemned Adam and Eve to live a life outside the Garden of Eden; In exactly the same way, Gatsby embraces technology so as to make sure that Daisy would be dazzled and decide to leave her life with Tom to follow him. Technology corrupted the people and destroyed the place leaving no space for the Garden to flourish. Cars polluted the American landscape and careless driving became a cause of death ²⁴⁶. John Kuehl writes that "The valley [in *The Great Gatsby*] is bordered by mechanization and urbanization: a highway, a railroad, and Wilson's dingy garage. In front of this garage where Wilson repairs cars, Myrtle, his wife, is killed by an automobile - Fitzgerald's symbol of violent death in the machine age"²⁴⁷ Last but not least, Kuehl remarks that the "*interweaving of pastoral nostalgia and cultural history*" refers to the "lost America", the

²⁴³ Lance "*The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction.*" p.30

²⁴⁴ Marx, Leo. *The machine in the garden. Technology and the pastoral ideal in America.* OUP, New York, 1964, p.358

²⁴⁵ Marx, *The machine in the garden*, p.360

²⁴⁶ Lance "*The Great Gatsby: Driving to destruction.*" p.31

²⁴⁷ Kuehl, John Richard. *Scott Fitzgerald: Romantic and Realist.* Columbia University, New York, 1958, p.417

promise land that is described in the end of the novel when the narrator so nostalgically refers to the “fresh, green breast of the new world” that “flowered for the Dutch sailors’ eyes”²⁴⁸. Nick’s description of a land that was once virgin and unspoilt is now corrupted and tarnished by the rapid and uncontrolled urban sprawl as well as the domination of technology and the use of cars which brought about evils in disguise.

²⁴⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 179

7. Gatsby and the withering of the American Dream.

For most critics of literature there is unanimity concerning the fact that *The Great Gatsby* is regarded to be the most indicative example of the American Dream. Trilling claims that "*Gatsby comes inevitably to stand for America itself*"²⁴⁹, however in Fitzgerald's own words we learn that "*The whole idea of Gatsby is the unfairness of a poor young man not being able to marry a girl with money. This theme comes up again and again because I lived it.*"²⁵⁰ The "American Dream" is more of a term invented right after the Twenties, during the Great Depression rather than a "*transhistorical concept*"²⁵¹, which resonates the all-the-way increasing racialized, nativist ideas of the 1920s, thus for Nick Carraway -and for the average reader of the novel- Gatsby is imagined as a figure of America.

The term, "American Dream" was coined by the historian J. T. Adams in 1931 in his book "*The Epic of America*"²⁵² where we can read that the "*American Dream*" is "*that dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank which is the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world*". Prior to that the term did not exist, albeit the novel that -according to literary scholarship and critique- encapsulates all the characteristics of this "Dream" was written in 1925, six years prior to the term's first use. The term is open to a number of different interpretations and approaches that aim at shedding light to this rather nebulous notion. Theodore Hornberger writes that "*The American Dream is, in one sense, an integral part of the Enlightenment. It is the notion that here, on the North American continent, men and women were to make a fresh start, to live a new life and new institutions, free of the cramping restrictions of hallowed customs and vested*

²⁴⁹ Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination*. Doubleday, New York, 1950, p.251

²⁵⁰ Turnbull, Andrew. *Scott Fitzgerald*. Grove Press, New York, 2001, p.151

²⁵¹ Decker, "Gatsby's Pristine Dream", p. 53

²⁵² Hartford, G. F. "Reflections and Affinities: Aspects Of The American Past, The American Dream, And "The Great Gatsby"." *English Studies in Africa* 16.1, 1973, p. 23.

interests. Here they were to build a society better than any the world had ever seen”²⁵³. Hornberger’s parallelism is very clearly put; For him, the “American Dream” is the new “Enlightenment” which leads any reader to make connotations regarding the European ideals of the Enlightenment as filtered in the Declaration of the Independence and the American Constitution by the founding fathers of the United States. A point of criticism regarding Hornberger’s point of view is that it is overly idealistic and it does not include any reference to the racial tension of the Twenties or the years before and after them. Another scholar, Frederic Carpenter explains that *the “American Dream has never been defined exactly, and probably never can be”*, as he claims that this term “is both too various and too vague”²⁵⁴, however, it was him who first linked Gatsby to the notion of the American Dream in a superficial remark of the extent to which the story of Jay Gatsby - who started from nothing to become rich, wealthy and famous- resonated with the notion of the “American Dream”. Edwin Fussell, another, scholar that links Gatsby to the “American Dream” expresses the view that the novel presents Gatsby as the personification of the corruption of the society with which he shares “common values and attitudes” that finally corrupt him and lead to his destruction²⁵⁵.

Is the “American Dream” the façade of a Utopia, the idea of a promise land, an “Eden-like world”²⁵⁶, Is it the “incorruptible dream”²⁵⁷ that Nick saw in Gatsby or is it corruption, destruction and withering linked to nationalist ideas and idealization of the past? These questions touch upon the core of the notion of the “American Dream” as presented in the Great Gatsby; Marius Bewley explains “*The theme of Gatsby is the withering of the American dream in industrial society*”²⁵⁸ as it gives – at the beginning- the false impression of a superficial goodness and fair heartedness, however this soon changes; Gatsby becomes rich and famous out of his illegal bootlegging activities, Wolfsheim is a conman, Tom commits adultery with Myrtle and the young

²⁵³ Denny, Margaret. *The American writer and the European tradition*. McGraw-Hall, New York, 1950, p.17

²⁵⁴ Carpenter, Frederic I. "American literature and the dream." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15.4 (1955).

²⁵⁵ Fussell, Edwin S. "Fitzgerald's Brave New World." *ELH* 19, p. 295

²⁵⁶ Hartford, "Reflections And Affinities", p. 26.

²⁵⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.179

²⁵⁸ Bewley, Marius. "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America." *Sewanee Review* 62, 1954, p.223

chambermaid, Daisy kills Myrtle and abandons her victim lying on the street, Jordan is described as a dishonest character and George Wilson shoots Gatsby to avenge both for his wife's death and for the adultery that he thought she had committed with Gatsby. The lowering moral standards along with the affluence of Gatsby's parties as described by Fitzgerald show – beyond any doubt- that the "American Dream" accentuates the deep corruption of the American society described in the novel, in which people break the law but evade punishment; they drink, during the Prohibition era, but no fine is imposed, they visit speakeasies and there are no repercussions, they commit adultery and are still in their marriage, they even kill but do not end up in prison. In his conclusive remarks Bewley explains that "we recognize that the great achievement of this novel is that it manages, while poetically evoking a sense of the goodness of that early dream, to offer the most damaging criticism of ... deficiencies inherent in contemporary manifestations of the American vision itself" ²⁵⁹. Regardless, Fussell's and Bewley's interpretive models share the assumption that Gatsby's dream is principally a product of the past projected in the present, as both critics assume that the emergence of the American Dream coincides with either European discoveries of the New World or the birth of the United States as a nation.

²⁵⁹ Bewley, "Scott Fitzgerald's Criticism of America." pp.245-246

8. Gatsby in Hollywood.

The Great Gatsby is one of the novels that have had a great impact through the years, therefore it comes as no surprise that insofar there have been five film adaptations. The first one was a silent film adaptation which was made in 1926, a movie of 1949 and another in 1975, a TV production in 2000 and – the most recent one- a movie of 2013.

The first movie was filmed in 1926, just one year after the novel was released. It was distributed by Paramount Pictures, directed by Herbert Brenon and the roles of Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan were portrayed by Wren Baxter and Lois Wilson, respectively. Although the film is lost and the only remaining trace of it is its trailer, there is a very significant detail about it that makes it very special; This adaptation of the novel was watched by both Fitzgerald and his wife Zelda Sayre in Los Angeles in 1927, some months after it was officially released. Both of them were purported to loathe the film and as Zelda wrote in an undated letter that Zelda wrote for the nanny to read to her young daughter Scottie, “We saw The Great Gatsby at the movies. It's ROTTEN and awful and terrible and we left”²⁶⁰. Ernest Hemingway also wrote about his experience with the first adaptation of the novel, “I had to pay to get in. Would have paid to get out a couple of times but on the whole, it is a good play”²⁶¹. From the very little sources left and from the newspaper reviews of the time, we can conclude that the movie seemed to be an amateurish production which in essence did not resonate with the ideas of the Twenties that Fitzgerald wanted The Great Gatsby to portray and this might have been the reason why the Fitzgerald’s practically left before the movie theater before the movie was even finished.

The second movie was filmed in 1949 directed by Elliott Nugent, and produced by Richard Maibaum, while Alan Ladd played the leading role of Gatsby. Although the producer

²⁶⁰Daniel, Anne Margaret “What Did F. Scott Fitzgerald Think of the Great Gatsby, the Movie, in 1926? He Walked Out.” *HuffPost*, 6 Apr. 2013, www.huffpost.com/entry/the-great-gatsby-movie-1926_b_3024329. [Accessed 4 Sept. 2022.]

²⁶¹James, Caryn. “CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK; the Endless Infatuation with Getting “Gatsby” Right.” *The New York Times*, 12 Jan. 2001, www.nytimes.com/2001/01/12/movies/critic-s-notebook-the-endless-infatuation-with-getting-gatsby-right.html. [Accessed 4 Sept. 2022].

had envisioned the filming of the *Great Gatsby* at the beginning of the 1940s, the film was censored by the Production Code Administration that -according to the New York Times journalist, Thomas Brady- called for “complete abandonment” of the story because of the “low moral tone”²⁶² that stemmed out of the Jazz Age and its aspects as depicted by Fitzgerald. More than twenty years after the novel was first released a great deal of things had changed in the world and in the U.S.A; If the first World War was an experience that traumatized the next generation, the second World War and its atrocities along with the tough experience of the deep economic crisis were long lasting scars that needed time to heal. The Roaring Twenties with the jovial atmosphere, the flappers and bootlegging belonged to the past and given the fact that this period was followed by a decade of unprecedented economic downturn, what the Twenties signified was not welcome in the American society. Maibaum said that Eric Allen Johnston, the then president of the Motion Pictures Association of America, “seemed to be afraid of starting a new jazz cycle” ²⁶³. Another reason why the film took so long to be approved could be that the Prohibition era that was historically the time when the plot of the novel unravels was a thorny issue for the American authorities²⁶⁴ and that is why in the actual movie we get so little of the Prohibition. Crowther remarks that the Roaring Twenties are “briefly and inadequately sketched” through the use of “Long Island parties, old clothes, old songs and old cars”²⁶⁵ . The movie lacked the brisk of the novel, additionally it is not accurate according to the plot of the novel and overly emphasizes on the love affair between Gatsby and Daisy²⁶⁶ and on Gatsby’s illegal activities²⁶⁷.

The 1974 adaptation is one of the most well-known. It was directed by John Clayton and written by Francis Ford Coppola. The Hollywood industry gave *Gatsby* some of its shine with

²⁶² Brady, Thomas F. “ALARUM in HOLLYWOOD; Varied Viewpoints.” *The New York Times*, 13 Oct. 1946, www.nytimes.com/1946/10/13/archives/alarum-in-hollywood-varied-viewpoints.html. [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022].

²⁶³ Brady, “ALARUM in HOLLYWOOD” [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022]

²⁶⁴ Crowther, Bosley. “THE SCREEN in REVIEW; ‘ the Great Gatsby,’ Based on Novel of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Opens at the Paramount.” *The New York Times*, 14 July 1949, www.nytimes.com/1949/07/14/archives/the-screen-in-review-the-great-gatsby-based-on-novel-of-f-scott.html. [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022].

²⁶⁵ Crowther, “THE SCREEN in REVIEW; ‘ the Great Gatsby.” [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022].

²⁶⁶ Crowther, “THE SCREEN in REVIEW; ‘ the Great Gatsby.” [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022].

²⁶⁷ Wulick, Anna. “Every Great Gatsby Movie, Compared: 2013, 1974, 1949.” *Prepscholar.com*, 2013, blog.prepscholar.com/the-great-gatsby-movies. [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022].

Robert Redford and Mia Farrow holding the leading roles. This version of *The Great Gatsby* film production boasts the most accurate depiction of the Twenties and albeit there was some criticism regarding the fact that the movie is rather long, slow and boring²⁶⁸, it is the one that is closest to the book²⁶⁹. The success of the “Redford *Gatsby*” was- on the one hand- attributed to the cast of very famous Hollywood actors and -on the other hand- on the fact that it nurtured the wish of a great number of ordinary people to live the “American Dream”, a term that by then had become rather popular, yet obscure and open to personal interpretations. Until then no one had captured the illusion of the great dreams and the passion for life better than Robert Redford, whose performance was considered to be iconic by most critics²⁷⁰, with some exceptions of course such as Kauffman who finds him colourless and uninteresting. The most dithyrambic remark concerning this film adaptation comes from Tennessee Williams who, in his book *Memoirs*, wrote: "It seems to me that quite a few of my stories, as well as my one-acts, would provide interesting and profitable material for the contemporary cinema, if committed to...such cinematic masters of direction as Jack Clayton, who made of *The Great Gatsby* a film that even surpassed, I think, the novel by Scott Fitzgerald"²⁷¹.

The 2000 version directed by Robert Markowitz was made for TV and has nothing of the glamor of the previous one. It does not transcend the Jazz Age or depict the Prohibition era adequately and the famous *Gatsby* parties are extremely sparse throughout the film and on top of that Toby Stephens as *Gatsby* is lifeless and cold as opposed to Nick Carraway, played by Paul Rudd and Daisy Buchanan played by Mira Sorvino both of whom got very positive reviews²⁷². This version is the shortest, timewise, and several parts of the very tight plot of the novel have been left out in order for the film to be short enough to be broadcast on TV. Some clichés of the Roaring Twenties, such as the women with bobbed hair and jazz music in the background do not delve into the soul of Fitzgerald’s novel nor do they touch upon the core of *The Great Gatsby* as a symbol, a novel which is “a wonder”, as Fitzgerald’s editor Maxwell Perkins wrote

²⁶⁸ Kauffmann, Stanley. “TNR Film Classics: “the Great *Gatsby*” (April 13, 1974).” *The New Republic*, 21 Jan. 2012, newrepublic.com/article/99875/tnr-film-classics-the-great-gatsby-april-13-1974. [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022.]

²⁶⁹ Wulick, Anna. “Every Great *Gatsby* Movie, Compared” [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022]

²⁷⁰ James, “CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK; the Endless Infatuation with Getting “*Gatsby*” Right.” [Accessed 4 Sept. 2022].

²⁷¹ Williams, Tennessee. *Memoirs*. New Directions Publishing, New York, 2006, p.78

²⁷² Wulick, Anna. “Every Great *Gatsby* Movie, Compared” [Accessed 7 Sept. 2022]

to him²⁷³. It is this omnipresent sense of “wondrous illusion” in the novel that is so much missed from the 2000 version²⁷⁴.

The latest version – and one of the most publicized along with the “Redford Gatsby”- is Baz Luhrmann’s *Gatsby*, starring Leonardo Di Caprio as Jay Gatsby, Carey Mulligan as Daisy, Tobey Maguire as Nick and an exquisite Elizabeth Debicki as Jordan Baker. Anyone who attempts to watch the last movie *Gatsby* should leave behind all the literary prejudice that the novel carries with it almost a hundred years after it was written. For some years now the book has become a classroom material and “a pop- cultural totem”²⁷⁵ and anyone who has some experience of the novel itself will be surprised by the fact that Nick (the authorial voice of Fitzgerald in the novel) is an aspiring writer who – in his attempt to cut himself off from alcohol- takes his doctor’s advice to dive into his past experiences. A significant discrepancy – blasphemy for some- is the music written by Jay-Z who had the music of the Jazz Age translated into the equivalent of our times. For many, the choice of hip-hop music -with some jazz music features- for the most part of the movie ruined the feeling of the Twenties from the very beginning²⁷⁶. Other than that, Luhrmann’s adaptation sticks to the novel’s details as far as dialogues are concerned, but at the same time he uses his own artistic sensibility which led critics to write about “a splashy, trashy opera, a wayward, lavishly theatrical celebration of the emotional and material extravagance that Fitzgerald surveyed with fascinated ambivalence”²⁷⁷. Luhrmann made his version flashy and made all the details, the mansion, the parties, the clothing and personal styling look “not even remotely alluring, enticing and fun”²⁷⁸. The movie emphasizes more on the grandiose, the excessive, the sense of waste and although it does resonate ideas such as nativism, and cynicism, it seems that the ninety years that set apart the

²⁷³ James, “CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK; the Endless Infatuation with Getting “Gatsby” Right.” [Accessed 4 Sept. 2022].

²⁷⁴ James, “CRITIC’S NOTEBOOK; the Endless Infatuation with Getting “Gatsby” Right.” [Accessed 4 Sept. 2022].

²⁷⁵ Scott, Anthony “Shimmying off the Literary Mantle.” *The New York Times*, 9 May 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/05/10/movies/the-great-gatsby-interpreted-by-baz-luhrmann.html. [Accessed 8 Sept. 2022].

²⁷⁶ Bassil, Ryan “Who Let the Great Gatsby Soundtrack Happen?” *Www.vice.com*, www.vice.com/en/article/6adpdj/who-let-the-great-gatsby-soundtrack-happen.com [Accessed 4 Sept. 2022].

²⁷⁷ Scott, “Shimmying off the Literary Mantle.” [Accessed 8 Sept. 2022].

²⁷⁸ Nast, Condé. ““The Great Gatsby”: Try Again, Old Sport.” *The New Yorker*, www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-great-gatsby-try-again-old-sport. [Accessed 8 Sept. 2022].

movie and the novel made Luhrmann choose over commercial success rather than a faithful depiction of the Twenties.

The fact that ninety-seven years after the novel was written there are four Gatsby adaptations – or better five, if we count in the lost 1926 version- shows the great impact of this novel along with the Great impact of the era it describes. The Roaring Twenties still fascinate the audience and the creators -directors, producers and even actors and actresses- should plunge into the depth of the Jazz Age, so as to depict it with the passion and the perseverance that tallies Fitzgerald's oeuvre.

Conclusion

This paper comes as the culmination of an exciting academic year with renown academics and excellent facilitators - as I personally like to call us, educators- both from the University of Piraeus and from New York University. For a hard-working father of two schoolchildren, meeting all the deadlines with commitment and diligence was not always easy. This thesis would not have been realized had it not been for the meticulous guidance of my supervisor, professor Konstantina E. Botsiou, who I personally thank for being so supportive and for leading me to the right choice of topic for the thesis. I would also like to deeply thank professors Marilena Simiti and Sylvia Maier, the other two members of the committee, for agreeing to take part in the evaluation of this endeavor. Last but not least, I feel indebted to make a special reference to the great novelist, Scott Fitzgerald and his depiction of the Roaring Twenties that has been fascinating me since I first read *The Great Gatsby* as a freshman in college, about 20 years ago.

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