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The Image of the 1920s in the USA in *The Great Gatsby* by F. S. Fitzgerald

Petra Schwarzerová

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Jméno a příjmení: **Petra Schwarzerová**
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Vedoucí bakalářské práce: **Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.**
Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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prof. PhDr. Karel Rýdl, CSc.
děkan



L.S.



Mgr. Olga Roebuck, Ph.D.
vedoucí katedry

V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2018

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ANNOTATION

The thesis deals with the 1920s in the USA and its portrayal in the book *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald, a member of the Lost Generation. The historical affairs are analysed in the wider context of the preceding half century. Apart from the events, the concept of the American Dream as a crucial part of the decade and the author's view of the decade are examined in order to provide a complex analysis.

KEYWORDS

1920s, Fitzgerald, american dream, consumerism, upper class

NÁZEV

Obraz 20. let 20. století v USA v díle Velký Gatsby od F. S. Fitzgeralda

ANOTACE

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá dvacátými léty 20. století ve Spojených Státech Amerických a jejich zobrazení v díle Velký Gatsby of Francise Scotta Fitzgeralda, jenž byl příslušníkem ztracené generace. Historické události dané doby se analyzují v širším kontextu již od poloviny 19. století. Za účelem poskytnutí komplexní analýzy se práce kromě těchto událostí zabývá konceptem Amerického snu, který tvořil důležitou část zkoumaného desetiletí, a také autorovým pohledem na danou dobu.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

dvacátá léta, Fitzgerald, americký sen, konzumerismus, vyšší třída

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0. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the 1920s in the USA, a decade symbolizing a new modern world, through the novel *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald was a prominent writer of that time, writing about and commenting on it. The book was chosen as a source for exploring the times because it is considered the essential piece of work reflecting it and in addition, it is praised as one of the crucial books determining American literature. In other words, the decade establishing the USA the world's most important country will be shown through one of the most important American books.

Before moving to the more detailed description of the contents of the thesis, the plot of *The Great Gatsby* will be briefly introduced. Nick Carraway, a man in his productive years, tells a story set on Long Island and in New York. The story is about his rich neighbour Jay Gatsby who threw pompous parties every week. As it turns out, he did it to meet Nick's cousin Daisy whom he had been seeing when they were younger. Unfortunately, she had already married Tom Buchanan. Their marriage, nevertheless, was not happy because Tom was cheating on her with Myrtle Wilson, the wife of a poor garage owner. That was why Daisy got involved in an affair with Gatsby after they had met during a visit at Nick's. At the same time, Nick was enjoying a romance with Daisy's friend, Jordan Baker. Towards the end, Daisy and Gatsby's affair was revealed and after a stressful argument, Daisy accidentally ran over Myrtle with Gatsby's car. Consequently, Mr. Wilson shot Gatsby because he thought Gatsby was the one who had been having an affair with his wife and the one who had killed her. The story ends with the complete abandonment of Gatsby by all his friends and even by Daisy who retreated back to her husband as if nothing had happened.

Now, the content of individual chapters will be looked into. The first chapter contains a literary context to the thesis. It is the description of the Lost Generation, an interwar group of writers of whom Fitzgerald was a member. The chapter explains the roots of the group, its members and Fitzgerald's contribution to it.

The two following chapters provide a historical context. The first part of the second chapter deals with the period between the end of the Civil War and the 1st World War as a necessary contributor to the mood of the 1920s. It was the time during which society started altering and the affairs it was going through eventually shaped the image of the examined decade. The second part of the chapter analyses the depiction of the period in *The Great Gatsby*.

The third chapter focuses on the crucial decade and its characteristic features, either changes continuing from the preceding period or new affairs brought by the newly established modern

society. The second part of the chapter again investigates the book as a mirror of the age and its protagonists as typical members of 1920s' society.

The fourth chapter is concerned with one particular feature of the 1920s and it is the American Dream. At first, its development since the colonization of America is looked into and then the focus moves to the portrayal of the modern dream in the book. Because the novel contains many examples of symbolism, alluding to the American Dream and other matters, its interpretation will be considered, too.

The last chapter will close the circle by referring to the life of the author himself. The way his life fitted the 1920s is dealt with, also the way he projected himself into his works. Through this, his attitude towards the period he wrote about in *The Great Gatsby* and which is the topic of the whole thesis is shown.

1. THE INTER-WAR LITERATURE

This chapter is concerned with features of one significant branch of the inter-war literature, the Lost Generation. The Lost Generation is a term embracing a group of young writers, who shared a similar fate and a view of the USA and tried to portray it in their works. The chapter explains why and how the Lost Generation developed, who the main representatives are and what motives they write about. Furthermore, a closer look is taken at Francis Scott Fitzgerald, his contribution to the Lost Generation and his style of writing. At the end, the features of the Lost Generation used in *The Great Gatsby* are explored.

Before moving to the specifics of the Lost Generation, it is necessary to introduce what preceded. With the beginning of the 20th century, there also came a new artistic movement called Modernism. It refused the puritanism of the 19th century and Realism which was bound with it. There was a completely new approach to literature, rejecting detailed and realistic depiction of things typical for the preceding century. According to Peter B. High, it split from the past and started experimenting. It experimented with language, form, the perception of time and it focused on the sometimes hard-to-understand stream of consciousness rather than the description of what happens.¹ The Lost Generation cannot be considered purely a modernist group. However, it certainly was influenced by some of its techniques. *Outline of American Literature* mentions, for example, the narrative point of view. The 19th-century Realism used an omniscient 3rd person narrator, whereas Modernism and Lost Generation used a 1st person narrator offering a subjective point of view and leaving a part of the meaning of the story hidden for the reader's wit to resolve.² Writers of the Lost Generation took the best of both preceding movements and created something new and very well balanced. While the subjective point of view is taken from Modernism, the narration is not carried away by the narrator's flow of thoughts. The narration style still holds on to the realistic depiction of situations, which enables the reader to feel like having the story right in front of his eyes. Thus, stories written by these authors offer an interesting mix of the two movements. It creates an original realistic narration distorted by a subjective point of view. Now, that the background of the Lost Generation and its connection to Modernism and Realism has been introduced, the reason for its emergence can be looked into.

Moving forward, the emergence of the Lost Generation was not a coincidence. It was a logical outcome of the preceding several decades. Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen trace the influence

¹ Peter B. High, *An Outline of American Literature* (New York: Longman, 1986), 130–132.

² Kathryn VanSpanckeren, *Outline of American Literature* (Washington: United States Information Agency, 1994), 62.

on the Lost Generation back to the end of the Civil War in 1865. At this time, the USA changed from an agrarian country into an industrialised one, with expanding cities, constructing railroads and getting richer as a whole. Mainly thanks to freedom of religion, a lot of European inhabitants moved across the Atlantic to find a better future. Just like the Pilgrim Fathers, they sailed to the USA in search of the Promised Land, ensuring free life and big money from industry. With the high influx of immigrants, the country finally managed to be settled from one coastline to the other. Unfortunately, nothing was as bright as it seemed. The majority of unskilled people ended up working in poor conditions for low wages. Apart from exploitation, industry and science brought a lot of new inventions, ranging from car to telephone, which eventually resulted in the whole population being concerned only with money. This seemingly perfect period was aptly named the Gilded Age by Mark Twain – a wealthy evolved country on the surface but inhabited by rotten consumer society.³ The second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century brought so many changes that younger generations started growing apart from their more conservative predecessors.

What 20th century also brought was the 1st World War. It not only disconnected the present and the past, it had such an enormous impact on society that it seemed that the past had never existed. Details of the impact the events of the post-Civil War period and World War I had on the American society will be dealt with in the following chapter, it only needed to be mentioned because it is the basis underlying the rise of the Lost Generation. In *Lectures on American Literature*, writers who belong to this group are described as Americans who either fought in the war or were indirectly involved in it. When the war ended and they came back home, they realized no one really understood what they had gone through, as it was a European conflict affecting America just a little. Therefore, they lost the bond to their relatives and beloved ones. They were disillusioned by the atrocities of the war, it destroyed all their hopes, feelings and beliefs. And on top of that, they were disgusted by the shallow values of American society and its materialistic way of life that preceded and followed the war, so they moved to Europe where they had higher chances of fitting in. Consequently, they lost even their homes and became expatriates. Most of them settled at least permanently in Paris, gathering in cafés and living their uprooted lives there. It was Gertrude Stein, a Modernist writer, who lived in Paris even before the 1st World War and who had a major influence on the young writers. She was the one who gave them the name Lost Generation.⁴ They could not have been given a better name,

³ Hans Bertens and Theo D'haen, *American Literature: A history* (London: Routledge, 2014), 93–96.

⁴ Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová and Erik S. Roraback, *Lectures on American Literature* (Praha: Karolinum, 2002), 238–240.

considering all their lost illusions about the world and the people living in it. Nobody who had not gone through the same could understand how lost and misunderstood they felt in the newly established society based on hypocritical values. It can be best described by the own words of one of the members, Ernest Hemingway: “I died then, I felt my soul or something coming right out of my body, like you’d pull a silk handkerchief out of a pocket by one corner. It flew around and then came back and went in again and I wasn’t dead any more!”⁵ Physically, they were alive and more or less healthy but mentally they were broken or even worse, dead. There was nothing better they could do than to try to express their war-torn souls and seek for understanding. And to base their career on that, specifically, to write about their feelings or lack of feelings, was a smart solution.

The term Lost Generation embraces authors whose careers flourished mainly in the inter-war period but there are also other authors that indirectly belong to the Lost Generation too. These are the authors of the age between the second half of the 19th century and World War I by whom the “real” members were influenced. They saw the rapid change the country and its society were going through and were not satisfied with the direction it was following. In their works, they expressed their scornful attitude towards selfish individualism. Mark Twain and Henry James should be mentioned as members of Realism. According to Brian Lee, Mark Twain expressed his disgust at the Gilded Age typical for its lack of morals, greediness and hypocrisy by means of satire. It is admirable that in his nostalgia for the noble values of the past, he kept his works light and humorous.⁶ The main character of his most famous novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, preferred morals of the past: “I was a trembling, because I’d got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself: ‘All right then, I’ll go to hell’ – and tore it up.”⁷ Huck decided to follow the voice of his good heart even though it meant breaking wicked laws and possible future punishment because he knew he was acting in the right way. That was the behaviour Twain missed in the society of the time and wished for it to come back. While Mark Twain compared the past and present society, Henry James focused on the contrast between societies of the USA and Europe. Bertens and D’haen state that at the beginning of his career, James saw the USA as a country full of simple, innocent people and Europe as a continent full of decadents. However, he changed his mind throughout the course of time and in the end rejected the whole American nation as irreversibly spoilt, turning to Europe. His books are greatly aimed at the

⁵ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 238.

⁶ Brian Lee, *American Fiction 1865–1940* (New York: Longman, 1987), 16–25.

⁷ Bertens and D’haen., *American Literature: A history*, 100.

psychological side of people and the tragedy as a consequence of a bad soul. The style of his writing varied from that of other realists as he decided not to explain anything to readers but let the characters themselves reveal the essence.⁸ Therefore, Henry James could be seen as a slight step from Realism towards Modernism. Following the publication by Bertens and D'haen further, Gertrude Stein is said to be a significant Modernist poet and novelist who created a circle of talented artists around her in Paris, whom she inspired and influenced as regards their writing techniques. Like James, she was interested in the processes of the human mind. In her publications, she used fragmentation and repetition.⁹ Stein was an extravagant emancipated woman in a profession dominated by men, which definitely contributed to her admiration and additionally supported the feminist movement. Apart from Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot are seen as highly influential poets when it comes to the Lost Generation. Ezra Pound is regarded as one of the earliest members of Modernism rebelling against the set rules of Realism. In *American Literature: A history*, he is described as highly experimental in terms of language, removing all unnecessary details from it and concentrating only on the precise portrait of the core meaning. Thus, he created Imagism, one of the streams embraced by Modernism. Thomas Stearns Eliot shared some language techniques with Pound but rather than for his language use, he is famous for his collection of poems *The Waste Land*. Here he depicted his personal crisis that corresponded with the post-war crisis of the whole population.¹⁰ Thanks to this collection of poems, Eliot is very close to the Lost Generation regarding the lost energy to live.

He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience.¹¹

The excerpt illustrates the emptiness in people who experienced the war and their closeness to death rather than to life. Such feelings together with disappointment in the consumer society were shared by the Lost Generation as well as previous generations of writers.

There is quite a high number of writers belonging at least to some extent to the Lost Generation, ranging from prose writers to poets. However, to show the main themes of the “real” Lost Generation stories, the most important prose-writing members will briefly be mentioned. In compliance with Peter B. High, outstanding writers of the Lost Generation are said to be Francis

⁸ Bertens and D'haen., *American Literature: A history*, 114–118.

⁹ Bertens and D'haen, *American Literature: A history*, 162–165.

¹⁰ Bertens and D'haen, *American Literature: A history*, 148–152.

¹¹ “The Waste Land Quotes,” Goodreads, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/389834-the-waste-land>.

Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos. They had a lot in common, especially in the 1920s when the disillusionment caused by the war was still fresh and the wasteful life flourished. All of them were born at the very end of the 19th century, lived in Paris for some time after the war, gathered around Gertrude Stein and of course, they were friends. What connected them was their experience with the war and their disgust towards American materialism and consumerism. Hemingway and Dos Passos both wrote about the war and its consequences at the beginning of their careers. Hemingway focused on the loneliness and emptiness of war veterans, whereas Dos Passos directly expressed his anti-war attitude while using his personal experiences.¹² Bertens and D'haen mention that later on, Dos Passos left the war theme and focused on a description of 1930s' society. Whereas, Hemingway used the war theme alternately with different themes throughout his whole life. The influence of Pound and Stein on his language was enormous.¹³ It was typical for him to use very simple language and always leave the major meaning of the story unsaid. This technique is called the iceberg theory. According to Dennis Welland, Fitzgerald, inspired by Hemingway, used the ingeniousness of the iceberg theory to draw readers into his works too.¹⁴ Even though Fitzgerald had a lot in common with his contemporaries, his themes entirely differed from theirs.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald once described the Lost Generation as people who grew up “to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in men shaken.”¹⁵ This could not be said by anyone but a true member of the Lost Generation, who knows the despair of being tired of living. So, he decided to abandon the frustrating past and took interest in the present. Unfortunately, the present was not very optimistic either. The mood of the 1920s portrayed in his books seems rather superficial. Richard Gray implies that all of Fitzgerald's works deal with the materialistic values of the USA. He highlights the importance of power, wealth and individualism.¹⁶ On the other hand, it is smartly pointed out in *Lectures on American Literature*, that this period did not produce individuals any more, because everyone was conformist.¹⁷ It means that people suddenly started to pretend to be bohemian and not bound by prejudices, which only resulted in all behaving the same way. People were greedy and prodigal at the same time. The meaning of life depended on a Saturday party and a new car. Fitzgerald managed to brilliantly depict the

¹² High, *An Outline of American Literature*, 143–152

¹³ Bertens and D'haen, *American Literature: A history*, 166–171.

¹⁴ Marcus Cunliffe, *American Literature since 1900* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 45.

¹⁵ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 243.

¹⁶ Richard Gray, *A Brief History of American Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 196–197, <http://people.unica.it/fiorenzoiuliano/files/2016/04/A-Brief-History-of-American-Literature-Wiley-Blackwell-2011.pdf>.

¹⁷ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 243.

period and its people by using well-chosen language. As it is said in *Outline of American Literature*, “his special qualities include a dazzling style perfectly suited to his theme of seductive glamour.”¹⁸ His themes resemble those of Henry James. Like him, he depicts wrong choices, behaviour and the flaws in the characters of his protagonists that lead to a tragic ending. Another important theme of his books is the American dream, which evolved from the time of the first settlers in the USA and unfortunately turned from the pursuit of a better future into the pursuit of money. The portrayal of the American dream by Fitzgerald will be further explained in the fourth chapter. Moreover, the stories he created were not coincidental. Timothy Parrish implies that all of his novels are tightly based on his life. Male characters are more or less based on Fitzgerald himself and female characters on women that played an important role in his life.¹⁹ It is reasonable that women were as important as men in his stories, considering their rising emancipation, especially in the 1920s. What is surprising is that it was not typical for other members of the Lost Generation to also highlight their role in the society. The resemblance of Fitzgerald’s life to his novels and his attitude towards the age he lived in will be more closely analysed in the final chapter. Now, the above-mentioned characteristics of the Lost Generation in his writing will be further explored in his masterpiece *The Great Gatsby*. To elaborate, the main theme of the novel is the desperate pursuit of the war veteran Jay Gatsby, who tries to win back the love of his dream lady. The story is surrounded by wild lavish parties that show the importance of money in this time and by the selfish behaviour of its characters, which eventually leads to a tragedy. It can be understood both as a criticism of 1920s’ materialism and as a criticism of the American Dream that pushes people to blindly do silly things. The fact, that the nature of people in the 1920s is presented as the obstacle preventing a happy ending shows the author’s annoyance with the time he was living in and represents one feature of the Lost Generation. There are also techniques of Realism and Modernism used. The story is narrated by one of its characters, Nick Carraway:

I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart. Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction—Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn.²⁰

The use of the subjective point of view is especially visible in this part because it shows only the attitude and wishes of the narrator himself and not an objective explanation of the situation.

¹⁸ VanSpanckeren, *Outline of American Literature*, 70.

¹⁹ Timothy Parrish, *The Cambridge companion to American novelists* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 92–100.

²⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 2.

Peter B. High in his publication points out, that thanks to it, the narration is authentic as well as realistic. There is a huge amount of apt adjectives creating a realistic view of feelings, settings of individual affairs and moods. On the other hand, the author also paid attention to imaginative describing lights and colours, which rather resembles Modernism.²¹ “There was music from my neighbor’s house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars.”²² In the excerpt, there is a typical example of Fitzgerald’s amazing ability to describe fleeting moments – everything and everyone is moving and seems somehow see-through as if it was not really happening. Gatsby’s lawn is never said to be ordinarily green, it always reflects ambient lights and glows in blue shades. Importance is also put on sunshine and moonshine, which foreshadow and accompany every event in the story. Features of Modernism as such, together with realistic narration by the story’s participant and the overall theme criticizing 1920s’ materialism, makes *The Great Gatsby* one of the best works written in this period, standing out among other works written by authors of the Lost Generation.

To summarize the chapter, the main features of the Lost Generation should be repeated. It is a group of poets, playwrights and prose writers, whose works flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, in other words, the inter-war period. Its rise was caused by Industrialization, the end of the 1st World War and by the consequent behaviour of the American society. The style of writing was inspired by Realism and Modernism, movements popular in several preceding decades. F. Scott Fitzgerald was one of the most significant members, whose novels and short stories depicted the materialistic values of the US society in the 1920s and the inevitable disaster following this selfish behaviour. It was not accidental that the society cared about shallow things like property. The events of the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century accumulated and eventually resulted in the atmosphere of the 1920s, which was so despised and criticized by the Lost Generation. Therefore, to better understand the decade Fitzgerald lived in and wrote about, the preceding times must be investigated.

²¹ High, *An Outline of American Literature*, 144.

²² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 39.

2. FROM THE CIVIL WAR TO THE 1st WORLD WAR

The literary context to Fitzgerald's work has been explored in the previous chapter and so the historical and cultural context will be analysed in the following two chapters. Before moving to the crucial period he described, the 1920s, it is necessary to go through relevant preceding events that formed the mood in the aforementioned decade. Post-Civil war reconstruction, Industrialization, urbanization, women's emancipation and World War I, all of which took place between the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century can be counted among such events. As a consequence of this period, the USA became the world's leading power, which was the status the country was enjoying in the 1920s. The second part of the chapter deals with exactly how the happenings of the period shine through in the tale of the 1920s, *The Great Gatsby*. For the purpose of showing the influence the preceding period had on the analysed decade, only the most important events that were somehow influential even in *The Great Gatsby* will be mentioned.

To begin with the earliest occasion, the end of the Civil War in 1865 must be mentioned. The Civil War ended with the victory of the North and the defeat of the slave-holding South and the calling for new laws ensuring rights for the freed slaves. Bryn O'Callaghan highlights two significant law changes. These are the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution, the first of which banned slavery and the second gave former slaves the right of citizenship and the right to vote. Nonetheless, better times were not yet to come. Although they officially had their freedom, in reality, they did not have the resources to support themselves economically and often came back to work for their former masters. People from the South were not prepared to give the blacks the equality they deserved and passed Black Codes, bringing segregation in public transport, schools and other facilities. On top of that, racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan were forming in that time, terrorizing black people in order to frighten them and prevent them from fighting for their rights.²³ This all foreshadowed the long journey the black people would have to undergo to win the desired equality. The second half of the 19th century did not only bring social changes, but also the economic transformation of the country.

The era between the two wars is seen as the era of transformation from an agricultural to an industrialized country. According to *An Outline of American History*, one of the factors that contributed to the change is the huge number of new inventions that made life easier. Such inventions were, for example, the typewriter, the telephone invented by Alexander Graham Bell

²³ Bryn O'Callaghan, *An Illustrated History of the USA* (Harlow: Longman, 1991), 54–57.

or the incandescent lamp by Thomas Alva Edison.²⁴ These things drew a line between the old times and the new ones as they enabled people to work more quickly, from a distance and even when the sun set and thus pushed them towards modern life.

Other progress was made in terms of transport. What Bryn O’Callaghan says is that building railroads helped to close the frontier. People were then able to travel from the east to the west coast within a few days. When other railroads were built, nothing was impeding quick trade all over the country. Maybe an even bigger advancement in transport was made when Henry Ford introduced mass car production through the use of a moving assembly line. Therefore, he quickened the process, more cars were being produced and more people could afford a car, which improved the standard of living.²⁵ Men like Henry Ford who found a gap in the market or were just skillful businessmen gained control over whole industries and became incredibly rich. Authors of *America: A concise history* mention two outstanding businessmen – Andrew Carnegie, an owner of countless steelworks, and John D. Rockefeller, an oil tycoon. Not only did these men make a fortune for themselves, but their businesses were beneficial also for the USA itself. Production of and trading with commodities like steel and oil led to the rise of gross domestic product and enriched the country as a whole.²⁶ This was, however, just one side of the coin. The other side revealed the life of every other worker, which was not that bright. Henretta, Brody and Dumenil describe the working conditions of ordinary people employed in those exact industries as harsh and harmful to health. They worked very long hours for very low wages that could not provide a decent living. To support their poor families, even children worked. One such example is the so-called Breaker Boys who worked in dusty mines for less than a dollar a day. Even though workers formed a predecessor of the trade union early in the second half of the 19th century, it took many years and a lot of effort before they achieved the regulation of working hours, the ban on children’s work or the ban on trusts, concentrating power over individual industries.²⁷ This is why Mark Twain named this period the Gilded Age. He said: “All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence, and then success is sure.”²⁸ On the one hand, the country was modernizing, getting richer, having a bigger influence in the world, but on the other hand, money and corruption made the world go round. Employers impudently exploited their workers who could not complain if they wanted to remain employed. The rich

²⁴ *An Outline of American History* (Washington: United States Information Agency, 1994), 180–181.

²⁵ O’Callaghan, *An Illustrated History*, 58–61, 75.

²⁶ James A. Henretta, David Brody and Lynn Dumenil, *America: A concise history* (Boston: Bedford / St. Martin’s, 2006), 506–514.

²⁷ Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, *America: A Concise history*, 514–533.

²⁸ “Mark Twain Quotes,” BrainyQuote, accessed February 10, 2019, https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/mark_twain.

were enjoying their wealth to the detriment of the poor, who lived in the shadow, being overlooked. Professor William Graham Sumner explained the problem of the Gilded Age simply through the theory of the survival of the fittest, Social Darwinism, which favoured the rich.²⁹ All the changes that came with Industrialization were no longer in compliance with life in the country, so people started moving to cities.

Urbanization, as the process of changing society from rural to urban is called, was a typical feature of Industrialization. Gary B. Nash and other authors of *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* indicate the location of factories as the cause of urbanization. People from the countryside flowed into the cities to find a job. Some of the big cities even tripled in population also thanks to the migration of the black people from the South to the industrial cities in the North and immigration mainly from almost all European countries. This was the time when the differences between the social classes were becoming highly visible. The poorest workers lived in crowded slums in the centres of industrial cities, whereas the upper class, who could afford to commute, lived on the healthier edges of the cities.³⁰ Although life in the city could offer permanent employment, the living conditions were miserable. The imperfections in the social order, working and living conditions brought dissatisfaction among the people, which often resulted in various strikes. The unrest appeared among women too, who began to aspire to gain equality in various sides of life, be it work opportunities or political rights.

Towards the end of the 19th century, when Victorian values were gradually disappearing, women started to cast doubt on their traditional role in society. According to Paul S. Boyer and collective, their primary role still meant housekeeping, although it was becoming more and more common for women to work in industry. However, the remuneration of their work did not equal that of men.³¹ Women had much lower wages than men and that was one of the reasons why they started calling for the right to vote so that they could actually change something. Rose Schneiderman, a member of the female suffrage movement, spoke in front of the Senate and presented the bare truth: “When the woman is preferred, it is because of her weakness because she is frail because she will sell her labor for less money than man will sell his.”³² It seems that in this respect, no one was interested in changing the tight Victorian values. Paul S. Boyer and other authors of the publication recognize the arrival of a significant transformation of the role

²⁹ Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, *America: A Concise history*, 571–571.

³⁰ Gary B. Nash, Julie Roy Jeffrey, John R. Howe, Allen F. Davis, Peter J. Frederick, Allan M. Winkler, *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 395–400.

³¹ Paul S. Boyer, Clifford E. Clark, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, Thomas L. Purvis, Harvard Sitkoff and Nancy Woloch, *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People* (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1990), 626–627.

³² David E. Shi and Holly A. Mayer, *For the Record: A Documentary History of America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 136.

of women during the World War I. Men, who had been busy fighting and coming up with war strategies, needed to be replaced in their positions at work, which women easily managed. After the war, they could no longer be deprived of their equality. Therefore, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, enabling women to vote, was ratified in 1919.³³ This act can be included among milestones marking the beginning of the 1920s. Women entered the new century as completely different creatures. In the publication of Professor Boyer and others, the New Woman is said to be keen on working, education and politics. It became acceptable for women to do sports and to claim their equality by divorcing husbands when unhappy.³⁴ While American women and the American nation as a whole struggled to achieve the optimum conditions in all branches ranging from work to politics, the European nations were heading into the biggest conflict about power.

The conflict has become known as the 1st World War. The war erupted in 1914 between the Allied Powers, consisting of Great Britain, France and Russia, and the Central Powers, composed of the Austria-Hungarian Empire and Germany. According to Nash and collective, the USA did not want to be involved in the European conflict and tried to remain neutral. However, they unofficially supported the Allied Powers through supplying them with weapons and food. After several attacks on American merchant ships carried out by German war submarines, the USA was eventually forced to break its neutrality and join the war on the side of Allied Powers in 1917.³⁵ Woodrow Wilson, the president of the USA at the time of the Great War, was a huge supporter of democracy and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In the Declaration of War against Germany, he expressed the intention with which the USA was entering the war:

The World must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.³⁶

With this in mind, American soldiers went to the battlefields. Henretta, Brody and Dumenil consider the romantic views of previous wars as one of the causes of the rise of the Lost Generation. During the war, soldiers lost their illusions and when they came back home, nobody cared about their traumas. They did not care because they did not take the war personally as it

³³ Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 815–816.

³⁴ Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 700–703.

³⁵ Nash et al., *The American People*, 479–488.

³⁶ Shi and Mayer, *For the Record*, 165.

was a faraway war. Despite the newly-emerged gap between the participants of the war and the others, the outcome of the war for the USA was seen positively overall. The economy and industry modernized, which made the USA the world's leading power. On top of that, women and racial minorities gained an unbeatable reason for not being overlooked anymore as contributors to the war victory.³⁷ Emancipation, modern inventions, wealth and the importance of the country in the world were the symbols of the beginning new era of the 1920s. Now, there is nothing left but the portrayal of the above-mentioned development of the USA between the end of the Civil War and the end of the Great War in *The Great Gatsby*. The analytical part of the chapter will go through the individual events as they are described in the chapter.

Firstly, Post-Civil war reconstruction is going to be considered. It must be said that even though *The Great Gatsby* was written half a century after the reconstruction was supposed to be finished, no big improvement considering the integration of the former slaves had been made. The idea of unsuccessful reconstruction is supported by the fact, that all characters from the book have white skin. There is no mention of a black person passing bay, let alone a black main character. Even Daisy Buchanan has fair skin, whose origins are in the South that used to be full of blacks. In fact, the fairer skin a woman had, the prettier she was considered, just as the Victorian value preached. That is why the female characters used to hide inside when the Sun was shining or wore hats to protect their faces from the sunshine. The only mention of the black population was made by Tom Buchanan: "Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white."³⁸ The black population is completely left out of the story and on top of that, the one single mention of them is racist. Tom said it in a very tense situation, when he found out about the affair of his wife Daisy and Jay Gatsby, and maybe he would not normally have said that. It implies that many people probably did not say such things out loud any more, but it was rooted in them deep down and it came to light once in a while. It appears that although the 1920s was a very loosened progressive era in terms of social relationships, as was mentioned earlier in the chapter, hundreds of years of slavery left its mark on the society and it would take more time to change its prejudices.

Another important process of the second half of the 19th century was Industrialization and the changes it caused. There was an advancement made concerning transport, especially railway and automobile, both of which played an important part in the story. The train was where Myrtle Wilson and Tom met for the first time before they started their affair. It was one of the first

³⁷ Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, *America: A Concise history*, 669–683.

³⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 130.

mistakes the characters had made that led to a decline. The climax of the story is also accompanied by an invention of the modern age. Upset by a quarrel that revealed Gatsby's and her affair, Daisy unintentionally ran Myrtle over with Gatsby's car, which led to her accidental death. From this moment on, all following events gained momentum and resulted in the tragic ending. Both means of transport appear during the crucial moments determining the plot of the story, pushing it towards the bad outcome. Consequently, it casts the modern inventions of Industrialization in a negative light as if they were spoiling people by providing comfort. The other name used for the time of Industrialization was the Gilded Age, whose concept was perfectly captured in the book. The story mainly deals with the rich upper class and its flaws. They do not seem to care about things that really matter like family or friendship, but only about shallow fleeting things like money, property and amusement. Yet, they still do not feel happy in their wealth and search for something more: Tom for excitement found in a mistress, Gatsby for the long-lost love and Daisy for distraction from her boring life.

'Her voice is full of money,' he said suddenly.

That was it. I'd never understood before. It was full of money – that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it . . . High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl . . .³⁹

Although Daisy is not satisfied with her monotonous life, the distraction she looked for in the affair with Gatsby was just a temporary desire. The real meaning of her life truly is the money, which she has always had from her parents in childhood and from her husband in adulthood. Though the book's theme is to highlight the corruption of the upper class, members of other social classes occur there too to emphasize the distinctions between the classes. Nick Carraway represents the middle class, building a bridge between the very rich and the very poor. Once he said about himself: "I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known."⁴⁰ He is the only character who managed to stay down-to-earth and see things as they are. He is neither spoiled by the power of money nor by the desperate need of it. Just like the authors of the concept of the Gilded Age, he saw the unfair practices the upper class used in order to get what it wanted. George B. Wilson is a member of the lower class who has a problem to get by. As the owner of a garage, he depends on Tom and other affluent clients that can provide him with a car to repair and sell.

'When are you going to sell me that car?'

'Next week; I've got my man working on it now.'

'Works pretty slow, doesn't he?'

³⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 120.

⁴⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 60.

‘No, he doesn’t,’ said Tom coldly. ‘And if you feel that way about it, maybe I’d better sell it somewhere else after all.’

‘I don’t mean that,’ explained Wilson quickly.⁴¹

It is an exact instance of Social Darwinism explained above. Tom can do whatever he takes into his head and Mr. Wilson must silently obey because it is crucial for him to be on good terms with his clients. The contrast between individual social classes was further intensified by the locations in which their members were living.

The Great Gatsby places its protagonists accurately in accordance with the principles of urbanization mentioned previously in the chapter. The whole story takes place in a city and its surroundings as if the countryside never existed. A slight departure from the principles can be found concerning Mr. Wilson. He and his wife do not live in a crowded centre of a city like the poor people did at that time, it is vice versa. They live in the middle of nowhere.

About half way between West Egg and New York the motor-road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat...⁴²

Instead of noise, they are surrounded by endless silence. There is nowhere to go, no one to talk to, nothing to adorn. The only getaway is either work, which is hard to find because not many people cross such land, or entertainment in the city which requires money. Each of the Wilsons chooses one of the possible getaways. Visits to New York enables Mrs. Wilson to be closer to the higher class and more distant from her hardworking husband. She feels she deserves to belong to the upper class. However, not even people rich enough to fit in the upper class are equal. Tom, Daisy, Gatsby and Nick all live on Long Island which is divided into two seemingly same Eggs. East Egg belongs to Daisy and Tom who has always had a lot of money, while West Egg is established for the nouveau-riche like Gatsby. Just as Nick said, Daisy who is a descendant of the rich acts “as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged.”⁴³ No effort could make up for growing up in luxury, the slight difference in manners will always be visible. The difference may be the degree of rottenness. While the newly rich know the value of hard work, the old rich take everything for granted, behaving superior to everyone.

The next issue the Post-Civil war period was dealing with was women’s emancipation. Though the New Woman is described as an emancipated woman with a job and involved in politics, not all women were like that. It looks like women from the middle and lower classes took an interest

⁴¹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 25.

⁴² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 23.

⁴³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 18.

in such matters because they wanted to improve their positions in society. Nevertheless, *The Great Gatsby* is a story about the upper class and the women roles were concerned about completely different things. Daisy appears to be a supporter of previously established values. It is no surprise, she had been brought up as the old South's elite, who had always lived well. She is fit for keeping the traditional role of a housewife, but the housework is done by her servants instead of her. That is why her life feels so empty and boring. Apart from being the empty perfect role model of an elegant lady, she has nothing to do. At the time of Tom's affair, the complexity of Daisy's role as an advocate of the noble past's values comes to light. "It's really his wife that's keeping them apart. She's a Catholic, and they don't believe in divorce.' Daisy was not a Catholic, and I was a little shocked at the elaborateness of the lie."⁴⁴ The observing of the rules was really just a mask that was keeping Daisy and Tom's life easy and comfortable, which shows how unscrupulous they are. The other woman protagonist, on the contrary, benefits from emancipation. Jordan Baker is a professional golfer, but rather for fun than from the need of money. In the previous years, it would be unthinkable for a woman to wear trousers, sweat and play sports. And now she could earn her living and live a single life without a husband to be supported by. Through this, the story goes back to depict how cunning the upper class was. The people did not care about the emancipation of women or racial minorities, that belonged among the most discussed problems of that age, they just used the issues in various ways to make the most of them for themselves.

The last event preceding the 1920s was the World War I. Apart from the Lost Generation, the war did not give the USA anything negative. There are two participants of the war in the book. The first one is Gatsby who in fact does not belong to the Lost Generation, or at least in the primary meaning of the term. Jay Gatsby is the most lost figure of all the characters, however, the reason for this being the illusion in which he lives. It is the complete opposite to the disillusion from which the members of the Lost Generation suffered. Gatsby had lost himself in the love for Daisy before the war started. Unfortunately, the war interrupted their romance and since, Gatsby was unable to understand that their love is in the past. For him, the war was not a pivotal moment of his life. In contrast to him, there is Nick. When Nick came back to his homeland, he realized he did not belong anymore because the war had changed him and nobody understood how. Consequently, he decided to move to the big city and forget. Unfortunately for him, the situation was no different in New York. Soon after he settled, he went to visit Daisy and noticed how huge the indifference of American people to the war was.

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 34.

'Even if we are cousins. You didn't come to my wedding.'
'I wasn't back from the war.'
'That's true.' She hesitated. 'Well, I've had a very bad time, Nick, and I'm pretty cynical about everything.'⁴⁵

This utterance highlights the absurdity of comparing the experience of war to more mundane problems, making clear that what really mattered in the USA was the abundance, following the war, that enabled people to have a marvellous time in the subsequent years.

In conclusion, it should be said that *The Great Gatsby* realistically captures all previously described issues of the period between the end of the Civil War and the 1st World War. The Industrialization, urbanization, emancipation of women and the blacks and the 1st World War itself are analysed from the point of view of the rich upper class living in the vicinity of New York. Owing to the behaviour of the main characters in the story, the upper class is portrayed as shallow, selfish and depraved. Although the affairs of the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century are a minor theme in the book, they provide the crucial context necessary for a complex understanding of the mood of the 1920s.

⁴⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 17.

3. THE NINETEEN-TWENTIES

The 1920s, the period between the end of the World War I. and the stock market crash in 1929, is known as the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age. The nation started where it left off before the war and continued in modernizing, getting rich and getting materialistic. F. Scott Fitzgerald said about the decade that “there seemed little doubt about what was going to happen – America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history.”⁴⁶ The chapter is concerned with selected issues considered the most typical for the 1920s and cultural and social changes following the events of the previously analysed era. These mean the Red Scare, Harlem Renaissance, Flappers, Prohibition, Mass culture and its consequences. The second part of the chapter, as well as the second part of the foregoing one, explores the depiction of the 1920s in *The Great Gatsby*.

Though the decade is known as an affluent period, the end of the war was followed by a short recession. Gary B. Nash and collective claim that agriculture was the most affected area. During the war, there was a high demand for agricultural products like wheat or cotton to support soldiers. But after the war ended, the demand dropped and farmers had a rough time getting by. That is why they started uniting into collectives to be stronger. Not only farmers but also other poor workers afflicted by the post-war inflation began supporting socialism, as it promoted joint actions and social help. This, however, encountered opposition from the rest of the country. Having a deterrent example of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, the American people feared socialism and Communism. The fear was ensued by a craze called the Red Scare. Paranoia led people to the impression that the country was full of Communist spies preparing a revolution to overthrow democracy. Consequently, they were prejudicial towards all non-conformist people and immigrants, trying to get them out of the USA. The Red Scare diminished as soon as people realized there was no real threat of Communism taking over the US government.⁴⁷ While the Red Scare troubled American citizens only at the beginning of the 1920s, the rejuvenated Ku Klux Klan, whose original group is described in the previous chapter, operated for a considerably longer part of the decade. Nash and others further explain that the Ku Klux Klan no longer focused only on terrorizing the black population but also foreigners and religious minorities different from Protestants, like Jews or Catholics.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, black people were already tired of the oppression and decided to demonstrate their equality by means of arts.

⁴⁶ High, *An Outline of American Literature*, 143.

⁴⁷ Nash et al., *The American People*, 500 – 502, 512 – 513.

⁴⁸ Nash et al., *The American People*, 502 – 503.

The black artistic movement was called the Harlem Renaissance, named after a New York neighbourhood in which a lot of the artists gathered. Henretta, Brody and Dumenil say that the movement consisted mainly of writers and musicians who used their African roots to create original self-determining art. They expressed their pride in their foreign roots but at the same time the right to belong in the American nation. Among eminent writers of the movement belong, for instance, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes.⁴⁹ Hughes in his poem *I, Too*, demonstrated the goal of the movement.

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.⁵⁰

The poem, just as other works by the authors of the Harlem Renaissance, portrayed the racial discrimination of the black people and displayed their determination to achieve equality with the white race. Besides writers, there were musicians who made maybe even bigger strides in proving the black race worthy of recognition. In nightclubs in New Orleans black musicians gave rise to revolutionary music called Jazz. The new genre became such a significant feature of the 1920s that the whole decade was given the nickname the Jazz Age. According to Maureen Anderson, Jazz also laid foundations for other genres in the following decades and thus became present almost in every kind of music. Despite its indisputable quality, white critics refused to appreciate the art coming from their black contemporaries, denouncing it as barbaric sounds accompanying African dances around a fire. However, not even the critique managed to erase Jazz from American life.⁵¹ On many occasions, everyone, regardless of skin colour, listened and danced to the unusual rhythms produced by saxophones, trombones, oboes and other musical instruments. The contribution the black race made to music by the creation of Jazz strongly manifested the right of blacks to be equal among white Americans.

Another characteristic feature of the 1920s is the changing role of women. Women had already departed from the Victorian role model at the end of the 19th century, as stated in the previous chapter, and evolved into New Women. Yet, women of the 1920s pursued the change further. The typical 1920s' woman, as Paul S. Boyer and collective explain, is called a Flapper. Flappers

⁴⁹ Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, *America: A Concise history*, 717 – 718.

⁵⁰ "I, Too," Poetry Foundation, accessed February 28, 2019, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too>.

⁵¹ Maureen Anderson, "The White Reception of Jazz in America," *African American Review* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 135 – 145.

were different both in appearance and behaviour. They were usually young women with bobbed hair who wore short dresses and more make-up than used to be appropriate. Unlike New Women, Flappers were not interested in politics and other serious issues of their time. They rather shocked society by enjoying parties, dancing the Charleston, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. Loosening sexual morals and establishing straight boyish figure as the ideal helped to leave behind the traditional role of women as mothers, wives and housekeepers for good.

Indulgence in alcohol by flappers and other people of the 1920s was in fact very paradoxical because the Roaring Twenties were associated with Prohibition. The 18th Amendment to the Constitution which was ratified in 1919 said that “the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof, for beverage purposes, is hereby prohibited.”⁵² Validation of the Amendment emphasized the ignoring of politics and law, as non-compliance spread throughout the country in the 1920s. Everybody was interested in their own business and entertainment, not caring for national affairs and observing laws. Tindall and Shi claim the goal of Prohibition was to rid the USA of unnecessary problems like alcoholism or violence caused by consumption of alcoholic beverages. Regrettably, Prohibition had the exact opposite result. The number of illegal bars, Speakeasies, was quickly increasing, selling so-called bathtub gin.⁵³ In fact, Prohibition worsened the situation in the country. Boyer and other professors add that it caused the rise of organized crime. Rival mafia bosses competed to be the most influential in the gangland and often engaged in deadly conflicts. One of the well-known bootleggers was, for example, Alfonso ‘Al’ Capone, leading organized crime in Chicago.⁵⁴ When Prohibition proved itself to have been an unsuccessful attempt to strengthen the nation’s morale, the 18th Amendment was invalidated in 1933.

The most distinctive of all features of the 1920s were affluence and the rising standard of living. What Industrialization of the second half of the 19th century began, the Roaring Twenties pushed forward. According to the census from 1920, Urbanization was complete. Cities were officially more populated than villages.⁵⁵ And because cities flourished with industrial production, trading with commodities became the alpha and omega of life. “The chief business

⁵² Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, Appendix xxiii–xxiv.

⁵³ George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 974–975, <https://web.viu.ca/davies/H132/TindallShi.Vol2.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 859–860.

⁵⁵ Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 841.

of the American people is business.”⁵⁶ That is what one of the three Republican presidents of the decade, Calvin Coolidge, said about the nation. Based on the publication by Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, electrical appliances, such as radios or refrigerators, together with already popular cars, are said to be the things people spent the most money on. People were tempted to splurge by the rise of advertisement which made them feel the need to catch up with the dozens of other citizens who led a supposedly better life.⁵⁷ However, the situation in the USA was not so one-sided. In the same way, Urbanization and Industrialization were constantly developing since the foregoing decades, the gap between the rich able to afford all the things and the poor barely having enough food was widening. Howard Zinn points out that only about 10% of the whole population was wealthy enough to be considered the “typical” carefree, having-a-good-time person of the 1920s.⁵⁸ There was no sign of charity or other kinds of help offered by the upper to the lower class. The wealthy people were really only concerned about their own prosperity and amusement. Thereby, it proves how superficial the country was, boasting about its affluent citizens, of which there was a small number, and how incomplete its presentation in front of the world was.

Even though imbalance ruled the country, be it between white Protestants and other minorities or between the rich and the poor, one thing was shared by everyone. It was the way people spent their leisure time. In the time of mass production in industry, it was no surprise that entertainment started to be organized similarly. Professor Boyer and collective mention that people enjoyed reading various mass-produced magazines including tabloids, fiction stories or investigative genres. Apart from going to parties and listening to jazz, the favourite activity was visiting cinemas. The 1920s brought an immense boom of movies and after the first movies with sound were released, it was clear that movie-going would remain an important part of American culture. With changing values and behaviour, people grew fond of sports. They either played them or at least passively supported their favourite sportsmen, despite scandals appearing about them in the above-mentioned tabloids.⁵⁹ While individual freedom was being promoted and celebrated, individualism as to originality was slowly disappearing from American society under the weight of mass production and mass culture.

Just as the prosperity of the Roaring Twenties had a quick start, the whole decade abruptly ended. The stock market crash on Wall Street in 1929 led the whole economy into depression,

⁵⁶ *An Outline of American History*, 249.

⁵⁷ Henretta, Brody and Dumenil, *America: A Concise History*, 702–704.

⁵⁸ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 382–383.

⁵⁹ Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision*, 844–848.

causing bankruptcies of individuals as well as companies. According to Howard Zinn, the blame was on the flimsiness of the whole system relying on a very small group of wealthy citizens to keep the economy going.⁶⁰ Suddenly, the United States had different problems to focus on than racial equality, emancipation, organized crime caused by Prohibition, let alone improving free time activities. Nonetheless, the following part of the chapter will focus on these affairs once again, this time on their portrayal in *The Great Gatsby*.

Moving on to the analysis, the first look will be taken at the decline of agriculture. It has been already mentioned that the book is focused on the depiction of the upper class living in industrial cities. However, the allusion to the agricultural situation of the country appears there too. “His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people – his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself.”⁶¹ This is a prototypical example, Gatsby was a son of farmers from the Mid-West, who had troubles making a living in the post-war recession. He considered his rural origin, in the time celebrating cities, so humiliating that he lied about his family and rather declared them dead than having to admit his inferior social position. This emphasizes the superiority of industry over agriculture in the time following the end of the 1st World War.

The Red Scare, which was described at the beginning of the chapter, is not directly involved in *The Great Gatsby*. However, another form of paranoia is there. Not surprisingly, it concerns the black population of the USA because the Harlem Renaissance, showing the abilities of the race, scared the white advocates of the old establishment of racial superiority.

‘Civilization’s going to pieces,’ broke out Tom violently. ‘I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* by this man Goddard?’...

‘...The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved.’⁶²

Tom is a representative of all the people who suffered from an absurd image of the black race preparing a bloody revolution in order to take revenge on the white race for slavery. On top of that, Tom proves himself incredibly narrow-minded when he blindly believes such an accusation without proper evidence and spreads it further.

Leaving out their repulsion for the blacks, the white race largely enjoyed Jazz, the music genre developed by black musicians, as has been mentioned before. It shows the hypocrisy of the

⁶⁰ Zinn, *A People’s History*, 386–387.

⁶¹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 99.

⁶² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 13.

whites. They had no problems enjoying pieces of art composed by the blacks but at the same time, they were not willing to recognize their place in America. Unlike the agricultural crisis and scorn for the Harlem Renaissance, which were given only a marginal space in the book, Jazz is an important detail there. The music plays during the Gatsby's parties not only to entertain guests and provide a rhythm to dance to. The parties are accompanied by the roaring Jazz as if to cover all the vices. Its fresh melodies hide everything from illegal drinking to immoral behaviour. "A celebrated tenor had sung in Italian and a notorious contralto had sung in jazz and between the numbers people were doing 'stunts' all over the garden, while happy vacuous bursts of laughter rose toward the summer sky."⁶³ The frolicsomeness of Jazz enabled people to release themselves from their conservatively set lives. This type of music perfectly captures the loosening morale of the Jazz Age. The importance of Jazz for the decade is further highlighted by Fitzgerald's need to create a fictional Jazz star Vladimir Tostoff, whose composition *Jazz History of the World* was proudly introduced during one of the parties. The popularity of Jazz realistically described in the book supports the legitimacy of the blacks to claim their equality and denies the effort of white critics to belittle their contribution to American culture.

The next examined issue of the 1920s will be the continual change of the social status of women. There were three significant female characters in the story, each representing a divergent role. Daisy, as was said in the previous chapter, is an example of the traditional housewife, though, it was just an insincere pose. Jordan, on the contrary, stands for everything the modern world has brought. "She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage,"⁶⁴ a typical example of a flapper's figure. She is a single young woman, who can drive her own car and go to parties alone. She does not really have a personality of her own but acts in a way to meet expectations about the upper class in which she belonged.

She was incurably dishonest. She wasn't able to endure being at a disadvantage, and given this unwillingness I suppose she had begun dealing in subterfuges when she was very young in order to keep that cool, insolent smile turned to the world and yet satisfy the demands of her hard jaunty body.⁶⁵

Her fake behaviour once again proves that the upper class pretended to be something more in order to keep the others green with envy because their superiority based on money was the only thing filling in the empty space in their emotionless lives. Jordan's popularity as a professional golfer meets another assumption about the Twenties. Everyone wanted to get to know her

⁶³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 47.

⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 11.

⁶⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 59.

through articles in magazines and admired her work. However, a considerably smaller number of people cared about her unfair demeanour during competitions, which supports the aforementioned statement about idolizing sportsmen despite their depravity. The third notable woman of *The Great Gatsby* is Myrtle. Rena Sanderson characterizes her as a caricature of the upper class. She tried so hard to reach the classy perfection falsely shown by the means of a mass culture that she became only a cheap imitation.⁶⁶ The impact of the way the wealthy people presented themselves on the lives of ordinary citizens is shown through the life of Myrtle Wilson, who, with her tacky appearance, considered a life full of money the only way leading to happiness. It may explain the imbalance between reality and the pose America kept in front of the world, mentioned previously. Nobody felt the need to talk about the poor when even the poor themselves tried to hide their identity.

To get back to the depiction of flappers, beautiful boisterous women wearing tasselled dresses and short hair, the following excerpt will provide an image of what the author of the book really thought about them. “They were never quite the same ones in physical person, but they were so identical one with another that it inevitably seemed they had been there before.”⁶⁷ However gorgeous they might have been, they lost half their captivation with the loss of originality. The endeavour to approximate to the trends promoted in mass media was the onset of abandoning individualism in American society and becoming conformist.

All the Gatsby’s parties that flappers and other visitors enjoyed were full of alcohol. Everyone was buying and drinking it but rather not trying to figure out where it came from in the time of Prohibition. The organized crime with alcoholic beverages creates an omnipresent but almost invisible background to the story. Just as Ruth Prigozy points out, there are many mysteries permeating Gatsby’s life. People have various theories about him, one including him being a bootlegger, but the reader must wait to the very end of the story for the truth.⁶⁸ Gatsby, in cooperation with Mr. Wolfshiem, owns a chain of drugstores where he sells illegal alcohol under the counter. Mr. Wolfshiem is a classic example of a criminal. He employed Gatsby right after his participation in the war when he needed money. It seems he has very warm feelings towards Gatsby, resembling father’s feelings for his son. Nevertheless, as soon as Gatsby was killed, Meyer Wolfshiem severed his connections with Gatsby, justifying it with the words: “Let us learn to show our friendship for a man when he is alive and not after he is dead,’ he

⁶⁶ Ruth Prigozy, *The Cambridge companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 155, <https://epdf.tips/the-cambridge-companion-to-f-scott-fitzgerald-cambridge-companions-to-literature.html>.

⁶⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 63.

⁶⁸ Parrish, *The Cambridge companion to American novelists*, 98.

suggested. ‘After that my own rule is to let everything alone.’”⁶⁹ He knew that after Gatsby’s murder, information about the illegal business would come out. So, in order to protect his own identity, he decided not to go to his funeral and be associated with him in any way. Thereby, the world of business, especially illegal, is described as callous, not creating space for empathy. However, not only Wolfsheimer is sly. Working in bootlegging has corrupted Gatsby as well. He got used to doing things in exchange for something else. When Nick set up Daisy’s visit for Gatsby to see her, Gatsby immediately offered Nick work in his business as a reward, not realizing it was a selfless act of friendship. Though he might have been seen as an antihero because of his secret actions, he is not. His corruption has a higher principle. His blind love for Daisy is the reason why he got involved in the business, to make enough money to be worthy of her. In other words, the end justifies the means. The time in which they lived was a time when anyone could achieve anything through having money. As it was demonstrated, Prohibition and the consequential organized crime influenced many lives, but the thing that really made people do everything was money. Both the possession and the pursuit of money spoiled people more than any illegal business could.

Speaking of the high standard of living, abundance and corruption of the richest 10% of the population, Daisy and Tom Buchanan cannot be left out. They fit every stereotype about the rich upper class of the Twenties. Daisy is a beautiful Southern Belle who married handsome wealthy Tom, the polo player. They live in a great mansion on the edge of the booming city with their gorgeous little daughter. When this seemingly perfect picture is looked at more closely, many imperfections can be found. Daisy pays no attention to her daughter, who is being brought up by a governess, and rather idles about with Jordan. Tom is bored with his family life and escapes to an exciting affair with Myrtle. On top of that, when he finds out about Daisy’s affair with Gatsby, he becomes tremendously jealous, demonstrating his old-fashioned belief that a man can do anything but a woman must obey. It gives the impression that they do not love each other at all and are together just to meet the expectations. Yet, their personalities match. “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...”⁷⁰ It turns out they are ideal for each other, unscrupulous, wrapped up in their fortune.

Another feature of the Roaring Twenties was mass culture and the idolizing of celebrities bound to it, described above. The portrayal of mass media and sport has already been briefly analysed.

⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 174.

⁷⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 182.

Both sports professionals, Tom and Jordan, though rotten in the soul, were popular for their charm and glamour. When it comes to the early cinematography, the situation was roughly the same. A movie star, that came to one of Gatsby's parties, was, in fact, motionless, boring and without a spark. In spite of this, Daisy was stunned by her mere presence. The idolizing of celebrities pushed the tendency to look down on ordinary, not so rich, people even further. The last, swift event which ended the whole decade was the stock market crash. It was mentioned before that the stock market crash changed the face of the whole country and threw it from the top to depression. Although *The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925 and its story takes place in 1922, the story was able to reflect the end of the pioneering decade in advance. Just one unfortunate event managed to crash everything that had been going so well before. After Daisy ran Myrtle over, a series of catastrophes came – Tom and Mr. Wilson lost a beloved woman, Gatsby lost his dreams and was killed and Nick lost his belief in people. Fitzgerald's decision for such an ending predicted that there is no other way for a time of very fast growth than to fatally collapse.

The 1920s cannot be better summarized than by the words of Ronald Berman: "It is a world of broken relationships and false relationships; a world of money and success rather than of social responsibility; a world in which individuals are all too free to determine their moral destinies."⁷¹ All important issues of the Jazz Age, apart from the Red Scare, were critically mirrored in the book through the lives of the upper class that was portrayed as self-centred. Except for the social criticism of the 1920s, the book contains an extensive criticism of the American dream, which will be explored in the following chapter.

⁷¹ Prigozy, *The Cambridge companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 83.

4. THE AMERICAN DREAM AND SYMBOLISM

So far, the book has proved itself a complex portrayal not only of the Nineteen Twenties but also of the preceding era. What is not missing there is, for instance, the struggle for equality of the black population continuing since the end of the Civil War, the gradual change of the role of women, the 1st World War or the Industrialization and its consequences. Nonetheless, the crucial aim of *The Great Gatsby* was to depict the American Dream in the context of the 1920s. The topic of this chapter will be the development of the American Dream, the depiction of its concept through various allusions and symbols and further symbolism emerging in the book. Firstly, the development of the American Dream should be briefly explained. The first glimpse could be caught as soon as the first colonizers were coming to America. According to Bryn O’Callaghan, 17th century England did not allow religious freedom. So, when the radical group named Puritans, calling for the simplification of Protestantism, became undesirable in religiously uncompromising England, its members decided to move somewhere, where their religion would be tolerated. In 1620, a Puritan group called the Pilgrim Fathers sailed on the ship the Mayflower to the east coast of America to found a colony suitable for their beliefs. During the following years, people from other European countries came to America to be able to choose their religion freely, too. Such nationalities were, for example, the Irish, Germans or the Dutch.⁷² For all of these mentioned incomers America was the Promised Land, promising freedom and opportunities to start a better new life. As the country and its population grew, the ideals were growing with it. From the free choice of religion, the American Dream gradually expanded into an opportunity to lead a wholly successful life. The authors of *An Outline of American History* state that at the beginning of the 19th century, westward expansion became the symbol of following a dream. The soil in the east was no longer very productive, therefore, people spread out west to be able to grow crops in large quantities. The motto of that era was “Go west young man and grow up with the country.”⁷³ During the Industrialization at the end of the 19th century, as was mentioned in the second chapter, the expansion was finished and the human race began to feel powerful as never before. The importance of the American Dream was raised again in the 1920s. The materialistic, consumer society, described in the third chapter, chased after money to be able to afford luxury goods, to live high on the hog and to provide an example for other countries in the world. The idea of the American Dream

⁷² O’Callaghan, *An Illustrated History*, 16–18.

⁷³ *An Outline of American History*, 139–143.

accompanied the American nation from its very inception but its goal was altering throughout the development of the people and their needs.

It cannot be denied that the American Dream, the idea that everyone can achieve whatever he or she desires, has its roots in the Puritan past. However, the means to achieve the particular goals had been changing over the course of time. Warren I. Susman states the dream of the 17th century Puritans to be the salvation by the grace of God. They wanted to merit it through a life full of self-restraint and morality lived in a theocratic society where common welfare was more valuable than that of an individual. During the 19th century, people still believed that the dream could be fulfilled through working hard. Although, the dream no longer had a religious nature and did not depend on cooperation. The new ideal was an individual person who succeeded in business. When the 1920s came, the dream of being a successful and wealthy individual remained more or less the same, maybe it just became stronger. Nevertheless, the last remaining Puritan value disappeared. People focused on having fun and abandoning the old morals, there was no room left for the self-discipline.⁷⁴ Thus, the concept of the American Dream had been transformed to mean the exact opposite to what it used to mean in the time of the first colonizers. Now, that the context had been explained, the depiction of the American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* can be moved onto.

Though the American Dream of the 1920s turned out to be something different from that of the Pilgrim Fathers, the Puritan legacy was not forgotten. In the final chapter of the book, Dutch incomers are mentioned in order to remind the readers of their importance.

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes – a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.⁷⁵

The settlement of the European emigrants in the territory of the future USA enabled the rise of the whole empire, without them, nothing would have existed. The excerpt further implies the long journey the inhabitants made to create the iron empire out of the idyllically looking landscape. As early as the first settlers came, they saw the potential of the country to live up to all expectations and to offer everything one could possibly need for a contented life, be it

⁷⁴ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as history: The transformation of American society in the twentieth century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 41–48.

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 183.

freedom for them or wealth for their descendants a few centuries later. America had remained a place providing space for everyone who wanted his dreams to come true. However, as the dreams differed, means for their fulfillment and the possibility to actually fulfill them also differed, as was mentioned before.

The 1920s seemed more than suitable for pursuing one's yearnings, with its promotion of the idea that everything is possible, but the boisterous way of life created an obstacle in reaching it. Gatsby's dream is the perfect example. He had been an accomplished person since childhood when he used to write detailed schedules of what to do and when. In adulthood, after he had set his heart on winning Daisy back, he subordinated every action he took to draw closer to it. Unluckily for him, genuine dedication and hard work were not appreciated in the Roaring Twenties and could not guarantee a positive outcome. As Tony Tanner put it: "In a world dominated by Buchanans, pure contingency reigns: frightening, grotesque."⁷⁶ Gatsby's old-fashioned practices were destroyed by Tom and Daisy's selfish behaviour controlled by random wishes. It may arouse sympathy for Gatsby living in a different time than would be suitable for him. The unpredictable events of the decade, ruining any attempt at gradual advancement, bring nostalgia for the past values and order, which is expressed more than once in the story.

Not only Gatsby's character and manners suit the past. According to John W. Aldridge, his whole dream – Daisy's love – is a dream to bring the past back.⁷⁷ Daisy used to love him but then the war separated them and she moved on. However, Gatsby fell for her so hard that he has lived for the past ever since, refusing to admit that too much had happened for their relationship to be renewed.

‘I wouldn't ask too much of her,’ I ventured. ‘You can't repeat the past.’
‘Can't repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’...
‘I'm going to fix everything just the way it was before,’ he said, nodding determinedly.
‘She'll see.’⁷⁸

The dialogue between Nick and Gatsby shows Gatsby's determination, almost obsession, not to accept the present state of things. The past was more real for him than the reality itself, so real that he incarnated it into probably the most characteristic symbol of the whole book. The green light, shining at the end of the dock by Daisy's house which Gatsby could see across the bay from his house, became the symbol of Gatsby's dream.

⁷⁶ Tony Tanner, *The American mystery: American literature from Emerson to DeLillo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 185.

⁷⁷ John W. Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation: A critical study of the writers of two wars* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1958), 49.

⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 111.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter – tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning –
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.⁷⁹

The fact it was the light that kept Gatsby's hopes alive is more than expressive. The light symbolizing the future, dreams and goals became a timeless symbol for everyone who hoped for the best. It is just difficult to distinguish between the dream waiting to come true and the past memory shining in the heart of the one who remembers.

Another reference to the past was made by Nick. In the excerpt, that has already been mentioned in the first chapter, he expressed his feelings when he came back from the war. "When I came back from the East last autumn I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever; I wanted no more riotous excursions with privileged glimpses into the human heart."⁸⁰ He saw with his own eyes what human ruthlessness was able to cause and wanted to avoid other clashes that could arise from it. He saw the solution in the past times filled with moral law.

One more symbol referring back to the Puritan values, described at the beginning of the chapter, was splendidly blended with the modern times. Tom Burnam implies that the billboard advertisement with a picture of a face dominated by the eyes stands for the God himself.⁸¹

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic – their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground.⁸²

While someone does not see anything peculiar behind the shabby picture of a man's eyes, Nick cannot shake off the feeling that they are unfathomably alive, watching every step of everyone moving across the valley of ashes. Mr. Wilson is sure that Eckleburg's eyes are the eyes of God. He looks down on the sinners and will eventually punish them, just as the Puritans preached. The inclusion of the role of God in modern society together with the mention of the Dutch sailors, the fact that Gatsby longed for the past state of things and Nick's wish society was more moral show the author's fondness of and nostalgia for the past times.

⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 183–184.

⁸⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 2.

⁸¹ Arthur Mizener, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 105.

⁸² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 23.

The Great Gatsby contains several more examples of symbolism apart from the hints glamorizing the past. One of them can be found in the way Myrtle's corpse looked like. Her left breast was partially torn away as if to suggest that love had died with her. It did not only end the love her husband had for her and the love between her and Tom, but also the love between Daisy and Gatsby and the affection between Nick and Jordan. The accident dealt a heavy blow to Daisy and Gatsby's fragile affair so that there was no chance of healing. After all the incidents during the day leading up to the tragedy, which Nick saw his companions to go through, he realized he did not want to have anything to do with a group full of self-centred, depraved people. Therefore, he broke up with Jordan a couple of days later. Myrtle's death, thus, managed to turn the lives of all the protagonists upside down.

Additionally, the book also contains examples of flower symbolism. The first one is Daisy, a name of a flower and the main female protagonist in one. According to an article on FTD blog, the flower primarily symbolizes innocence and purity.⁸³ It is a great irony that Mrs. Buchanan was named after a flower symbolizing these virtues. Although she presents herself as a sweet, harmless young woman to live up to the meaning of her name, she is, in fact, corrupted and money-oriented, as has already been proved. The second reference to flowers was again made to describe Daisy.

Through this twilight universe Daisy began to move again with the season; suddenly she was again keeping half a dozen dates a day with half a dozen men and drowsing asleep at dawn with the beads and chiffon of an evening dress tangled among dying orchids on the floor beside her bed.⁸⁴

This was said about her life after Gatsby left for the war. Orchids are said to express the elegance, luxury and refinement of the one who receives them.⁸⁵ So, even though she grieved for Gatsby for a while, she was not able to hold on and wait for him. Instead of this, she let other men remind her of her exceptionality and got married as soon as she found someone handsome and rich at the same time, someone who fitted in her extraordinary life. It is no surprise, that in her world there was no room for true love and that it eventually had to crush Gatsby's belief in love, which is traditionally represented by a rose.

If that was true he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and

⁸³ "Flower Meanings and Symbolism," FTD, published 2016, <https://www.ftd.com/blog/flower-meanings-and-symbolism>

⁸⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 152.

⁸⁵ FTD, "Flower Meanings and Symbolism."

how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, ...⁸⁶

In the end, Gatsby had to leave his made-up world, face reality and understand that love counted for nothing in there. This excerpt superbly connects the nostalgia for the past, described previously, and flower symbolism. It proves the story was very well thought out, regarding the indirectly expressed points.

On top of the difficulty trying to achieve one's dream in the indifferent world of the Roaring Twenties, the protagonists had made one fundamental mistake that prevented them from having a happy ending. As was explained earlier in the chapter, the established direction of pursuing the American Dream was to go west. Nevertheless, all the characters headed east. "I see now that this had been a story of the West, after all – Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life."⁸⁷ It is understandable the Buchanans moved to the east for its pulsating vitality and Gatsby moved there to follow Daisy. Nick was also attracted by the possibilities the city was offering but he realized he did not belong and decided to move back home. None of them belonged there, that is why nobody managed to achieve their dreams.

To conclude, it needs to be highlighted that *The Great Gatsby* criticized the whole concept of the American Dream. Dreaming separated people from the reality of the 1920s, not permitting them to reach anything without unscrupulousness. That is why the book expressed nostalgia for the past times in which it was possible to fulfil one's dreams in a righteous way. To depict this opinion, various symbols are used, ranging from Dutch sailors to the green light. Although F. Scott Fitzgerald disdained not only the American Dream, but the whole way of living in the 1920s, his life greatly resembled what characterizes the decade.

⁸⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 163.

⁸⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 178.

5. THE LIFE OF F. S. FITZGERALD

This chapter deals with the life of one of the most celebrated American writers of the 20th century, about whom Arthur Mizener said: “His best work in fact grows out of his precise understanding of his time, out of a concentration on the actualities of his world unequalled in the work of any contemporary.”⁸⁸ Francis Scott Fitzgerald dedicated his whole writing career to the depiction of the society in which he lived. His own life fitted many characteristic features stereotypically attached to the 1920s. Inspired by his personal affairs, he wrote all of his major works. The chapter will at first describe important events of his life that had happened mainly before he wrote *The Great Gatsby*, and later their reflection in the novel. Through this, his attitude towards the Jazz Age, as he had named the 1920s, will be analysed.

In the first place, a brief look must be taken at Fitzgerald’s life. His life and work have been wonderfully described by an expert on him, Arthur Mizener, who described the origin of Fitzgerald’s parents at first. His father was a descendant of a typical Southern family, whereas his mother was a daughter of an Irish immigrant. F. Scott was born in 1896 into a middle-class family from a Mid-western city, St Paul, Minnesota, where he also spent his childhood. Whereas his mother represented financial stability for the family, his father passed down good upbringing and morals. At the age of 17, he began his studies at Princeton, however, he was already more interested in writing than in studying. Apart from his own father, a Catholic priest, Father Fay, was a man who had a major influence on the young Scott. He showed him that even a life dedicated to God can be exciting and sophisticated. The influence of Father Fay and Scott’s half-Southern origin made him want to lead a distinguished life. In 1914, during his visit home, he fell in love with Ginevra King, a beautiful, wealthy, confident girl. Unfortunately, she rejected him saying that rich girls do not marry poor boys. Fitzgerald continued in pursuing his writing career and eventually, the chance to successfully graduate from Princeton disappeared, so he decided to join the army in 1917.⁸⁹ Untypically, the war had brought something good to him. Further following Mizener’s biography, it was revealed that Fitzgerald met Zelda Sayre, his future wife, during his service in Alabama. At first, she refused to marry him because of the lack of money, too, but after he published his first book and earned a great deal, she agreed. The Fitzgeralds spent some time living in New York and France, just as the members of the Lost Generation typically did, going to parties, drinking and blithely enjoying themselves. It was also in France, where their relationship suffered serious damage. Zelda had an affair, which

⁸⁸ Mizener, *F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 4.

⁸⁹ Arthur Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald and his world* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 5–34.

broke something in the devoted Scott and their marriage was never the same. Half a year later, *The Great Gatsby* was published.⁹⁰ This book is considered the best he has ever written. Therefore, it can be considered the peak of his life because from that moment on, his life only deteriorated.

One of the greatest problems Fitzgerald struggled with during his whole life was alcoholism. According to Joseph Lyttleton, he drank from a very early age and never admitted to it being a problem. Partly, it was an integral part of his and his wife's leisure time which they spent mostly at parties and by squandering money on extravagant amenities and partly, it was a part of his writing ritual as he said drinking helped him to write better. Although he had always claimed it was not an addiction and he could quit whenever he wanted to, he continued drinking, with short pauses, until his untimely death in 1940 when he was only 44 years old. He died of a heart attack which was induced by his alcoholism and exuberant way of life.⁹¹ His unhappy end of life was caused, apart from alcoholism, by bad relations with Zelda and the lack of money. Arthur Mizener explained that Zelda suffered from schizophrenia and went through several mental breakdowns from 1930 onwards, which forced her to live in hospitals instead of with Scott. Expenses on her treatment and Fitzgerald's ongoing eccentric life pushed him into debt. The last attempt to make things better was his effort to start a career in Hollywood's movie industry. It was a smart move because movies were very popular at that time, which was mentioned in the third chapter. Nonetheless, his attempt was unsuccessful.⁹² Fitzgerald did not manage to realize his American Dream of living a harmonious, noble life. He yielded to the temptations of the glittering 1920s and paid a high price for it. On the other hand, all of his experiences provided him with material to create wonderful stories.

It has already been implied in the first chapter, that everything he wrote was inspired by his own life. John Aldridge saw the similarity in the settings of Fitzgerald's novels. He made his debut with the novel *This Side of Paradise* set in Princeton, Fitzgerald's alma mater. *The Beautiful and Damned* takes place in New York, which is one of the places he lived in with his family. Another novel, *Tender Is the Night*, is inspired by France, his expatriate sanctuary and his last unfinished piece of work, *The Last Tycoon* is set in Hollywood, where he himself spent the rest of his life.⁹³ Not only the setting of the books resembled his life, but also the plot lines.

⁹⁰ Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 36–49, 55–57, 66–67.

⁹¹ Joseph Lyttleton, "F. Scott Fitzgerald – A Brief Examination of Alcoholism in a Literary Icon," *10 Cities/10 Years*, January 31, 2012, <https://10cities10years.com/2012/01/31/f-scott-fitzgerald-a-brief-examination-of-alcoholism-in-a-literary-icon/>.

⁹² Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 80–90, 98–104.

⁹³ Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation*, 56–57.

For instance, *Tender Is the Night* reflects Zelda's struggle with her mental illness. The similarity between the stories and Fitzgerald's life goes even deeper; the characters resemble all people, including himself, that influenced him. To further explore this reflection, *The Great Gatsby* will be analysed.

In this book, he portrayed himself through the characters of Gatsby and Nick. What he had in common with Gatsby was his poor origin and attitude to it. Ruth Prigozy pointed out that Fitzgerald talked about himself as a Princeton man rather than to admit his poor Mid-western origin.⁹⁴ It has already been mentioned in the third chapter, that Gatsby did the same. He said his parents were dead so that he did not have to say they were poor. The fact that Gatsby also came from Minnesota is an obvious unconcealed reference to the author himself. Another thing they shared was the power to dream and to do everything and anything to achieve the dream. They both decided to become respectable, rich men and subordinated every action to it. As Prigozy explained, the kind of behaviour of trying to gain upward motion on the social ladder was given the attribute after the protagonist – “gatsbyesque.”⁹⁵ Thus, Fitzgerald unintentionally labelled himself and many other people with the same desire. Even though Gatsby and Nick are opposites to each other, a dreamer and a realist, the author managed to incarnate himself into both, demonstrating his ambivalence as regards the 1920s.

The whole book proved itself a social criticism of the Twenties and because it was narrated by Nick, into whom Scott put a part of himself, it shows the attitude the author had towards the decade. Both Nick and Scott looked scornfully at the society surrounding them, but at the same time, they were strongly attracted to it. In the beginning, Nick came to New York in order to learn bond business to keep abreast of the modern times and he dated Jordan because of her attractiveness, not her soul. In the end, he sobered up and saw society clearly. “‘They’re a rotten crowd,’ I shouted across the lawn. ‘You’re worth the whole damn bunch put together.’”⁹⁶ This is what Nick said to Gatsby at the end. Actually, this is what Fitzgerald told himself. Unfortunately, unlike Nick, he was not able to resist the temptations such as alcohol, parties or spending money and lived trapped in his own life. Despite this difference between them, Fitzgerald put Nick into the same life situation in which he was. Towards the end of the book, Nick turned thirty and said to himself: “Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness, a thinning list of single men to know, a thinning brief-case of enthusiasm, thinning hair.”⁹⁷ The author was

⁹⁴ Parrish, *The Cambridge companion to American novelists*, 93.

⁹⁵ Parrish, *The Cambridge companion to American novelists*, 92.

⁹⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 155.

⁹⁷ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 136.

29 when the novel was published, discontented with his marriage and praise for his writing inadequate to what he expected. As can be seen, he did not have hope for the affairs to get better and that is maybe why he was looking for comfort in alcohol. F. Scott based both male characters of the story on himself to express his helplessness. He was the observer of his own life, watching the bad direction he was heading in, and a lost person in his dream, unable to change the direction at the same time.

Another man briefly memorialized there was Father Fay, Fitzgerald's role model mentioned above. His last name was used as Daisy's maiden name. Through the role of Daisy two important women for him were reflected. These were Ginevra King, his first love, and Zelda Sayre, later Zelda Fitzgerald. He was inspired mainly by one occasion he went through with both of the wealthy young women and it was a rejection owing to his lack of money. Daisy could not marry Gatsby because he was too poor to provide her with the luxury she was used to. It could be assumed that Fitzgerald had been traumatized by these experiences because he even stressed the problem to get married without money through Nick, the second man he put himself into. "That's right," corroborated Tom kindly. "We heard that you were engaged." "It's a libel. I'm too poor."⁹⁸ Nick considered engagement for a man of his social position completely ridiculous. Dennis Welland pointed out the next detail inspired by Zelda was Daisy's origin. Both were so-called Southern Belles coming from rich families.⁹⁹ In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald depicted women as shallow creatures interested in beauty and fun more than in an honourable character. He did not hide his opinion on women behind the story but even expressed it openly in one of his letters. "They do not like women to be presented emotionally passive—as a matter of fact I think most women are,..."¹⁰⁰ It has been proved that he really was not satisfied with his life and the time he lived in, as was implied earlier. Through Gatsby and Nick, he expressed his inability to accustomize to the nature of the 1920s' upper class even despite his desire to do so and through Daisy he showed the women he loved, again in not a very pleasant light.

Moving from the book back to his personal life, the attitude towards World War I as an event whose end marked the beginning of the Jazz Age and the Jazz Age itself will be once again investigated. Regarding his view of the war, he did not see it romantically as lots of Americans did, which is mentioned in the second chapter. This is what he wrote to his mother about his enlistment:

⁹⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 20.

⁹⁹ Cunliffe, *American Literature since 1900*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Turnbull, *The Letters of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 488.

... please let's not have either tragedy or Heroics because they are equally distasteful to me. I went into this perfectly cold-bloodedly and don't sympathize with the
"Give my son to country" ...

or

"Hero stuff"

because I *just went* and purely for *social reasons*. If you want to pray, pray for my soul and not that I won't get killed – the last doesn't seem to matter particularly...¹⁰¹

He did not have any illusions about the war even before he experienced it, however, it did not stop the disillusionment from which he suffered and which brought him the "membership" in the Lost Generation. As was mentioned in the first chapter, disillusionment with the world after the war was one of the features connecting members of this interwar artistic group. Fitzgerald, nevertheless, was not shaken by the war itself, he was disappointed with the behaviour of the society that followed. As he said, he went to war for social reasons, to help make the world a safer place to live and what he encountered was what disillusioned him. People led silly fights for power and when the fights were over, they focused on another silly goal, possessions.

This chapter has revealed Fitzgerald's negative attitude towards the 1920s, which he saw as an age full of foolish priorities: money, fun and social status. The age was very quickly altering, distancing itself from the old values, so it must have been very challenging to keep pace with it. According to Mizener, he had an eccentric way of doing so. His room was filled with clocks and calendars for him to be constantly reminded of modern times.¹⁰² Nevertheless, his distaste for the 1920s kept him dreaming about the past and specifically, the nobility of the Old South in which he had his ancestors. It was because he knew it was impossible to live successfully in the swirling world of money and jazz without being someone like Daisy. Another reason why he despised the age was that he himself was unable to escape its temptations and often engaged in wild parties himself.

As has been proved, he could not withdraw his personal experience when writing *The Great Gatsby* and other works. It was a smart step by him because he could not find a better example of the 1920s' people than were those surrounding him. "...I want you to meet Zelda because she's very beautiful and very wise and very brave as you can imagine—but she's a perfect baby and a more irresponsible pair than we'll be will be hard to imagine."¹⁰³ F. Scott Fitzgerald can, therefore, be seen as a critic and an admirer of the 1920s at the same time. *The Great Gatsby* can be seen as a brilliant reflection of the 1920s and a hidden autobiography at the same time.

¹⁰¹ Turnbull, *The Letters*, 451–452.

¹⁰² Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald*, 110.

¹⁰³ Turnbull, *The Letters*, 459.

6. CONCLUSION

The Great Gatsby has proved to be a good source to reflect the Roaring Twenties because it provides a wide context for the reader to be able to picture and understand it with all its details. Although it is a story of the 1920s, all the discussed affairs of the preceding half a century, such as the beginning of women's and black emancipation, the Industrialization or World War I, create a background to it in order to highlight that even such a well-marked decade cannot be examined out of context.

The decade itself was looked at from the upper class's point of view. It was a logical way to look at it because the rich were what determined the stereotypical presentation of the USA at that time. The qualities the country possessed have repeatedly been said to be materialism, consumerism and individualism in the selfish kind of sense. The 1920s' upper class engaged in carefree entertainment like movie-going, sport, partying and drinking, not observing any rules. Cheating in both business and private life became a standard and politics was not able to make a difference. Prohibition was an excellent example of not caring about politics at all because drinking is bound to the Twenties more than to any other decade in the USA. Though the Jazz Age is perceived as very progressive, regarding social organization, it still applied mainly to the white race. The blacks were making only small steps towards independence.

The 1920s had, undoubtedly, its bright side, too. A great advancement had been made in terms of movie-making, transportation and the standard of living as a whole. However, F. Scott Fitzgerald saw and portrayed the times as times full of dishonesty. "The young people in America are brilliant with second-hand sophistication inherited from their betters of the war generation who to some extent worked things out for themselves. They are brave, shallow, cynical, impatient, turbulent and empty. I like them not."¹⁰⁴ That is why he turned the American Dream of his protagonists and of himself into the pursuit of the past.

Although the 1920s was an age of great opportunities, people could not waste a lot of time with their heads in the clouds, ignoring reality. Otherwise, they would be destroyed by the swift pace of modern life. Despite the negative depiction of the Roaring Twenties as a depraved age leading humanity into doom, it cannot be denied that the decade had its glamour and elegance, making it irresistible.

¹⁰⁴ Turnbull, *The Letters*, 489.

7. RESUMÉ

Tato práce se zabývá rozborem 20. let 20. století v USA. Primárním zdrojem pro jejich analýzu byla kniha napsaná v tomto období F. S. Fitzgeraldem, *Velký Gatsby*. Hlavním dějem knihy byl nesmyslný hon bohatého pašeráka alkoholu Jaye Gatsbyho za dosažením dávno ztracené lásky. Příběh končí Gatsbyho vystřízlivěním z jeho iluzí a jeho smrtí. Práce měla za cíl prozkoumat zobrazení jednotlivých historických událostí zmíněného desetiletí v díle a získat tak autentický obraz doby z pohledu jednoho z nejvýznamnějších amerických autorů.

Text byl rozdělen do pěti kapitol, které se věnovaly jak literárnímu, tak i historickému kontextu a dále subjektivnímu názoru autora knihy. První kapitola zkoumala ztracenou generaci, což je skupina spisovatelů z meziválečného období vyskytující se výhradně ve Spojených Státech. Ztracená generace se vyznačuje svým odporem k válce získaným přímou účastí v první světové válce a deziluzí způsobenou nezájmem okolní společnosti vůči válečným veteránům. Kromě Fitzgeralda mezi její nejznámější členy patří Ernest Hemingway a John Dos Passos. Zatímco tyto dva členové se ve svých dílech věnovali zobrazení války, Fitzgerald se zaměřil právě na poválečnou společnost a její kritiku. Autoři ztracené generace se nechali inspirovat spisovateli předešlých uměleckých směrů a hnutí, a to realismu a modernismu. Tudíž se v jejich dílech mísí prvky realistického vyprávění a modernistického subjektivního pohledu na věc. V závěru kapitoly se vliv realismu a modernismu konkrétně vztáhl na analyzované dílo *Velký Gatsby*.

Pro úplné pochopení nálady dvacátých let je potřeba prozkoumat její příčiny. Proto bylo účelem druhé kapitoly poskytnout vhled do období předcházejícího dvacátá léta, ve kterém se společnost již začala pomalu blížit modernímu modelu. Tuto dobu, od konce občanské války po konec první světové války, charakterizovala poválečná rekonstrukce poraženého Jihu, industrializace, urbanizace a měnící se společenský statut žen. Zrušení otroctví a následné zrovnoprávnění Afroameričanů nicméně neznamenaly jejich toleranci. V každodenním životě byli stále segregováni a utlačováni. Postupný vývoj průmyslu a technických vynálezů pomohl usnadnit život občanů a dát jim stálou práci mimo zemědělství. Na druhou stranu ale také umožnil bohatým vlastníkům jednotlivých průmyslů vykořisťovat zaměstnance a provádět ilegální akce. Mimo to industrializace také zapříčinila urbanizaci. Lidé se stěhovali do měst, aby byli blíže práci v továrnách. Druhá polovina 19. století byla také významným obdobím pro ženy, které poprvé v celé historii začaly bořit konvence o tradiční ženské roli matky a hospodyně a začaly se ucházet o práci a prosazovat své rovnocenné postavení ve společnosti. První světová válka byla milníkem značícím začátek nové doby. Účast Spojených Států v tomto konfliktu je postavila do role nevlivnější země světa. Druhá část kapitoly se věnovala zobrazení

těchto událostí ve Fitzgeraldově díle. Kompletním vynecháním Afroameričanů z díla autor naznačil jejich nerovnoprávnost mezi bohatými bělochy. Industrializace byla představena jako nástroj usnadňující zbohatlíkům žijícím ve velkoměstě život tím, že jim poskytla automobily, telefony, rádia a další moderní vynálezy. Ženské postavy v knize zastávaly jak tradiční role Viktoriánské doby, tak i moderní nezávislé ženy. První světová válka vytvořila pozadí příběhu tím, že zasáhla do životů hlavních protagonistů a změnila jejich pohled na svět stejně tak, jako změnila pohled na svět ztracené generaci.

Třetí kapitola se věnovala době, která dala název celé této práci. 20. léta 20. století jinak označovaná také jako „bouřlivá dvacátá“ či „jazzový věk“ zaznamenala rychlý vzestup ekonomiky i životní úrovně. Jak již bylo zmíněno v předešlé kapitole, velký vliv na to měla industrializace a urbanizace, které byly ve dvacátých letech na vrcholu. Afroameričané pokračovali ve svém boji za rovnoprávnost, stejně tak ženy. Charakteristickým prvkem dvacátých let byla prohibice a rozvoj masové kultury. Harlemská renesance bylo černošské umělecké hnutí, jehož cílem bylo zviditelnit jejich um a tím i právo na plnohodnotný život. Nejvýznamnějším „výtvozem“ tehdejších Afroameričanů se stal jazz, revoluční hudební žánr, který reflektoval uvolňující se morálku doby. Ta mohla být viditelná zejména v oblasti společenského postavení žen. Typickým výjevem byla nekonvenční mladá žena zvaná „flapper“, která se nebála bořit společenská tabu předešlého období. Bez výčitek chodila na večírky oblečená do krátkých šatů, kouřila a pila alkohol. Alkohol samotný budil ve dvacátých letech rozruch, jelikož byl prohibicí zakázán. Přesto neexistuje doba, ve které by lidé alkoholickým nápojům holdovali více než právě za prohibice, kdy se lihoviny ilegálně vyráběly a šířily. Posledním rysem bouřlivých dvacátých let zmíněným ve třetí kapitole byla masová kultura a produkce zábavy. Lidé se oddávali sportu, večírkům a návštěvám biografů s černobílými filmy. Na všechny tyto události se pohlíží očima vyšší vrstvy, kterou kniha vyobrazila jako sebestřednou a zvrácenou. Arogantní postavy stále pohlížejí na černochoy jako na méněcenné více než padesát let po zrušení otroctví, přesto si zplna užívají poslechu jazzu. Ženy si sice užívají všech radostí života stejně jako muži, ale kvůli tomu také ztrácejí své osobní kouzlo. Zdá se, že všichni se přetvařují a podvádí jen proto, aby dokázali ostatním, že s penězi jde uskutečnit vše, i když tomu tak ve skutečnosti není. Postavy *Velkého Gatsbyho* bezmyšlenkovitě hýří penězi a podvádí jeden druhého, aby sobecky dosáhli svých směšných cílů. I přes veškeré pokroky a úspěchy, kterých Spojené Státy během dvacátých let dosáhly, jako je například jejich signifikantní postavení ve světě, životní úroveň jejich obyvatel nebo pozvolné opouštění starých předsudků, se tato léta vnímají jako doba plná sobectví, nečestnosti, materialismu a konzumerismu.

Ve čtvrté kapitole se práce specifickěji zaměřila na koncept amerického snu, jakožto na jeden ze základních rysů společnosti dvacátých let a hlavní téma *Velkého Gatsbyho*. První část kapitoly stručně popisuje vývoj amerického snu od dob prvních kolonií v 17. století. Tehdy náboženští emigranti z Evropy, kteří se označovali za otce poutníky, připluli do Ameriky hledat „zem zaslíbenou“. Americký sen pro ně především znamenal náboženskou svobodu, jíž chtěli dosáhnout pomocí tvrdé práce, oddanosti Bohu a mravního chování. Postupem času se sen měnil a místo svobody náboženství se cílem stal úspěšný, bohatý život. Tvrdá práce a zasloužení se o vytoužený stav věcí se postupně také vytratil a lidé dosahovali svých cílů podvodně či zcela náhodně. Proto se v celé knize neustále objevují náznaky toho, že si její protagonisté přejí vrátit čas do dob, kdy věci měly ještě nějaký řád. Naneštěstí, čas vrátit nejde a život prožívaný v iluzích a mimo realitu nejde udržet navěky. Realita nakonec dostihne každého a pád, který následuje, je mnohdy velmi tvrdý, stejně jako v případě *Gatsbyho*. Jak si může čtenář při bližším pohledu na Fitzgeraldova díla všimnout, Fitzgerald do svých příběhů promítal události ze svého života i své vlastní názory, a právě tím se zabývá poslední kapitola práce.

Fitzgeraldův krátký život byl plný hořkých zklamání, ale i divokých večírků a alkoholu. Takto ho také vyobrazil ve *Velkém Gatsbym*. Mužské protagonisty založil na sobě. Jak již bylo zmíněno dříve, prostřednictvím svých hrdinů vyjádřil především své pohrdání dvacátými léty, která se značila chamtivostí a rozhazovačností lidí. Zároveň ale vyobrazil i svou neodolatelnou touhu proniknout do samého středu celého toho víru. Co se týče ženských hrdinek, nechal se inspirovat hlavně jedním okamžikem, a to odmítnutím od ženy kvůli jeho nedostatku peněz. Tím se opět vrátil k tomu, jak materiálně založená byla tehdejší společnost.

Velký Gatsby se osvědčil jako nejlepší možná volba pro analýzu 20. let 20. století, jelikož poskytnul komplexní realistický obraz nejen tohoto desetiletí, ale i předešlého půlstoletí. Celkově byla dvacátá v knize vyobrazena velmi negativně. Její autor odsuzoval povrchní hodnoty tehdejší společnosti, jejímiž pilíři byly peníze, zábava, nespoutanost a nemravnost. Americký sen, který byl pro tu dobu tak typický byl ve výsledku nedosažitelný, protože realita vyžadovala neustálou pozornost a nedovolovala lidem se zastavit a snít. I přes veškerou rozmazlenost a zkaženost ale není možné vidět jazzový věk pouze ve špatném světle. Byla to doba elegantní a šarmantní, která učinila velký krok směrem k moderní společnosti od puritánské minulosti.

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