

# ***The Great Gatsby* as a Portrayal of American Society during the Roaring Twenties**

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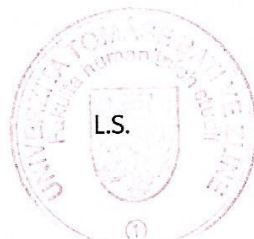
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce poskytuje čtenáři náhled na historické, ekonomické a kulturní pozadí 20. let minulého století v Americe a analyzuje zobrazení tohoto období v románu *Velký Gatsby*. První kapitola se zaměřuje na prosperující ekonomiku, její přínosy ve formě nových vynálezů a rozvinutého průmyslu. Druhá kapitola zdůrazňuje zejména změny postavení žen ve společnosti a také se dotýká náboženství a problémů týkajících se imigrace a rasismu. 18. dodatek Ústavy Spojených států amerických je hlavní podstatou kapitoly číslo tři a popisuje celý průběh Prohibice. Na závěr kapitola čtyři analyzuje zmíněný román a komentuje výňatky z knihy, které dokládají skutečnost, že autor románu vyobrazuje společnost 20. let minulého století dle svých zkušeností a vnímání.

Klíčová slova: *Velký Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Společnost, Bouřlivá 20. léta

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis provides a reader the insight into the historical, economic and cultural background of the period of the 1920s in America and analyses its portrayal in the novel *The Great Gatsby*. The first chapter focuses on the prosperous economy, its benefits in the form of new inventions and industry development. The second chapter mainly emphasizes changes in women's life and touches religion and issues with immigration together with racism. The Eighteenth Amendment is the main essence of chapter three and it describes the whole process of Prohibition. Finally, chapter four analyses the mentioned novel and comments on excerpts, which illustrate the fact that the author of the novel depicts the behaviour of the 1920s society according to his experiences and perception.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Society, Roaring Twenties

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*“I’m not sure what I’ll do, but— well, I want to go places and see people. I want my mind to grow. I want to live where things happen on a big scale.”*

*- F. Scott Fitzgerald*

I would like to dedicate these lines to amazing women who stood by my side in moments of need. Pavla, Alžběta, Vendula you are the best people that I have ever met and I would like to thank you for everything. I must admit that without your encouragement and support I would not be able to move on and start all over again. You brought light to the darkest days of my life.

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor’s thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## INTRODUCTION

Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is a novel deeply embedded in the context of its time, the twenties of the last century. The period of the 1920s is entitled Roaring Twenties, by right. America entered a period of economic prosperity by the end of the Great War. The industry and production flourished as never before which as a result brought up new inventions and an excessive number of products that the market could not absorb. Society learned to utilize a concept called “buying on margin” and using loans with which people could acquire new products and houses. The boom of the industry and mass production sowed seeds of the destruction of nature and caused environmental problems. Corporate prosperity brought out growth in wages and more leisure time was available. Sports and leisure activities gained their popularity and education has moved to the first place. The business became oriented towards the consumer and the first national and regional chains were established. However, widespread enthusiasm and alcohol abuse caused the ratification of The Eighteenth Amendment to the United States known as Prohibition, which disallowed production and distribution of alcoholic beverages. Prohibition was aimed to be a solution to the situation, but eventually, it resulted in a crime excess.

The 1920s became a period of significant changes in women's lives. Women formed many organizations to gather and through their unification, they succeeded in enforcing women's suffrage. The accomplishment had motivated them to become more involved in politics and besides the suffrage, they lobbied for education, industrial reform and equal rights. Their position in society changed and the women engaged in progressivism abandoned the morals of the Victorian Era and gave birth to a new female ideal called Flapper. Music came to the fore and Jazz music together with Charleston was enjoyed not only by flappers. They walked around the hidden speakeasies, which were bars selling illegal alcohol. Its intimate atmosphere allowed them to drive and enjoy men's attraction. These new women were boisterous and with skipping the morals of the previous era they became sex symbols.

Social class played an important role and people become more money and wealth oriented. Those in the upper class presented their wealth with luxurious cars, clothing, and lifestyle. Due to deeply rooted racism, not everyone could get pleasure from the period of significant changes and welfare. Blacks were moving from East to the industrial North in search of a better life and work, however, they had to face discrimination and exploitation. The second Ku Klux Klan was on its rise and America became home for many immigrants, which caused apprehension to the Americans and also some government interventions.

*The Great Gatsby* is a portrayal of the society during the 1920s and it depicts their behaviour as well as a social, economic and political changes.

# 1 ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

## 1.1 Consumer society

The twenties might be described in many ways, and the spending spree as a result of goods excess is one of them. A wide range of products was affordable to almost everyone. Paid vacations spread and people started to get keen on leisure and as a result, the expenditures increased by 300% during the decade. Tourist camps spread all over the country and to keep the nation entertained, nightclubs and amusement parks offered convenient occupation for weekend leisure and allowed an individual to relax, dance and enjoy free time.<sup>1</sup>

People also learned to relax by doing sports. The central symbol of consumer culture was youth and vitality. Sports helped to commercialize the trend and enabled workers to switch from a work to a leisure mode. Boxing, baseball, football as well as golf or tennis was very popular sports. Its popularity generated demand for recreation so parks and clubs were establishing.

Some made a sport their career and by signing to this decade as sports stars they proved that one can make himself up by discipline along with clear-cut rules of the individual sport. For instance, Red Grange and Knute Rockne were famous football players and names such as Helen Wills, a tennis star, or boxer Jack Dempsey could take their place alongside movie stars like Charlie Chaplin, Rudolph Valentino or Mary Pickford. Magazines, newspapers, and advertising increased in their popularity and therefore they became a convenient means of sales promotion. All the means of mass media pointed out the nationalization of American culture.<sup>2</sup>

The period of the 1920s is labelled as the housing boom as well. In 1924, about 11 million people purchased their own house. People started to be interested in education when more money became available, and as a result, during the period of 1910 and 1930, the overall spending on education rose from \$426.25 million to \$2.3 billion. In addition to this, higher education became a priority, too.<sup>3</sup> Thus illiteracy slumped to 4.3%. Education is associated with books, which gained in popularity and new publishing houses and bookshops were established. Especially classics, including Shakespeare or Dickens, were favourite books to read.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 77-78.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (London: Widenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 718-719.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *A History of the American People*, 719.

Americans were the first to enjoy the luxury of exact-size clothing, and they were also the first who used a vacuum cleaner or listened to the commercial radio broadcast. Furthermore, cars, electricity, and telephone became characteristics for this period. Two-thirds of households were connected to electricity by 1930, and as more and more of them came, new appliances entered into the market. Refrigerators, toasters and washing machines greatly facilitated the everyday life. Even though the appliances claimed to be convenient assistants in house maintenance they could not shorten the weekly cleaning. In fact, they raised the social standard and women had to clean a house more often and vacuum daily because, with the arrival of new technologies, the level of cleanliness increased, too.<sup>5</sup>

The dining culture had also changed and people preferred the consumption of sugars and fruits over bread or potatoes. During the World War I, processed foods, such as canned and frozen food, started to be produced, which was a very important innovation that people quickly got used to. The businesses became focused on the consumer which demanded advertising and convenient marketing strategies. During the past decades, the advertising was very simple and ineffective. Therefore, it underwent some changes so the pictures and slogans appeared in advertisements. Psychology began to engage in advertising and as a result, the first advertising campaigns were targeted at consumers seeking luxury and prestige. Brands began to build their name and use attractive slogans.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.2 Increased power of corporations

In the book *The Modern Temper*, Lynn Dumenil uses *The Crowd*, a film made by King Vidor in 1928 as a testimony to American culture becoming a consumer culture. According to Dumenil, it depicts people turning to leisure and consumer in order to live a satisfying life. He further provides a portrayal of the key factor such as reducing the quality of the work and decomposition of individual autonomy in a mass and corporate culture. In the twenties, the society completely dropped the work culture, behaviour and values of the Victorian era. At first glance, these cultural changes are attributed to the influence of war and reform simultaneously with the matter of the fact that Americans had more money and more available products on the market. However, Dumenil states that what is essential about the issue, is the work and its association with the increased power of corporations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> S. Mintz, S. McNeil, "The Consumer Economy and Mass Entertainment", Digital History, accessed April 12, 2019, [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp\\_textbook\\_print.cfm?smtid=2&psid=3396](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook_print.cfm?smtid=2&psid=3396).

<sup>6</sup> Mintz, McNeil, "The Consumer Economy".

<sup>7</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 56-57.

### 1.2.1 Blue-collar work experience

The concept of consumer culture was made possible by the flourishing of the industry, therefore blue-collar workers, labouring especially in manufacturing, witnessed the whole formation process. Assembly line, as a new contrivance, facilitated the work process. Although this invention was beneficial, it turned work into a repetitive routine. Once the worker took his place at work, he became a slave of the mass production chain.<sup>8</sup>

Frederic W. Taylor introduced the term “scientific management”, which he aimed to bring to the factories. He believed that management needs to remove the authority from the foremen in a process of decision making and planning. Thus he claimed that the authority should be shifted to engineers. To make the production process as profitable as possible, the engineer measured the time with stopwatches and determined the maximum pace of work. Management then gave workers the precise instructions on how to manage their work. Taylor’s system was not as popular as it might seem, very few companies followed his system at each step. However, the management control, systematization and specialization spread. As a result, in many factories and offices, the managers restricted workers’ autonomy. As another consequence skilled craftsmen suffered the most. Although the production increased, the salaries remained the same. People worked more, at a faster pace, but for the same amount of money, which led to their displeasure.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.2.2 White-collar work and struggle

As for the world of white-collar workers, middle-class people were influenced by the developments within the corporation. The retail market was ruled by small stores and therefore people like African American entrepreneurs were offered the opportunity to join the market and created a small ethnic middle-class. Chain stores began to expand and there exist almost 160,000 stores and over 7,000 chains in 1930.<sup>10</sup> Large national firms were offering lower prices, had a quick turnover and possessed a huge part of advertising, which enabled them to take the control over the small businesses rather than to limit their ability to create prices. Moreover, the products of those big companies were popular for their brand-name and were supported by national advertising. As another example of the extensive firm’s power was the ability to affect the content and format of small-town newspapers. More and more newspapers were comprised of photographs, celebrity news, advertisements or national news

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<sup>8</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 58-59.

<sup>9</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 60-61.

<sup>10</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 72.

while local news which was essential for the small newspapers were shifted into the special separate columns.

Small retailers appraised the productivity and progress of the country which they attributed to the big businesses. However, they needed to protect themselves from the power of chain stores. They organized many campaigns to attain a legislative act that would circumscribe the competition's influence, but unsuccessfully.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.3 Mass-production and automobiles

A great boom of industrial production took place between the years 1910 and 1920, followed by an increase of 12%. Moreover, during the period between 1920-1930, the percentage rose to 64%. The boom concerned automobile production as well. In the period 1919-1929, the number of cars produced annually reached 4.8 million. The consumption of other commodities went hand in hand with the production of automobiles, which supported the production of steel, rubber or glass. With the arrival of 1929, 70% of the industries were electrified. The enhancement facilitated the workflow and increased the amount of production per worker. Moreover, the new technologies worked very precisely, therefore, skilled workers were no more needed.<sup>12</sup>

In 1914, Henry Ford introduced the moving assembly line, which was a giant benefit for mass production. It brought a tremendous increase in automobile production per day, especially for the Ford Motor Company, because it helped to raise the number of produced Model A's to 6,400.<sup>13</sup> As a result of higher per capita income, Americans could afford the automobiles and there was no shortage of demand. Ford's production techniques started to be used by other automobile producers so the market could offer brands like General Motors or Chrysler.<sup>14</sup> General Motors led by Alfred Sloan made its mark in the automobile industry by developing new marketing strategies and approaches to advertising.<sup>15</sup> The number of active automobile producers in 1929 was 44, however a lot of the producers were forced to end the business due to the Great Depression.<sup>16</sup>

The conspicuous consumption and the action of acquiring commodities by using credit and instalment took its toll. Causes of the market crash were examined by many scholars and

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<sup>11</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 72-73.

<sup>12</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 59.

<sup>14</sup> "Automobile History", History, last modified August 21, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/automobiles>.

<sup>15</sup> Mintz, McNeil, "The Consumer Economy."

<sup>16</sup> History, "Automobile History".

economists. Nevertheless, there exist some theories which can explain it. To acquire a loan was very easy at that time. The market was stable, which encouraged people to borrow money without any fear. In the case of a stock market, people used the concept of “buying on margin”. Money was borrowed from a stockbroker to purchase a stock. The principle was, “to put some of the money down, then pay for the rest of the shares with profits when the paper was sold. The concept worked and the stock prices kept going up.”<sup>17</sup> The crash did not appear like a bolt from the blue, it was a result of a long-term market growth, supported by overconfidence of the people. During the period of 1922-1929, each year recorded 20% increase. In August 1929, just before the stock market crash, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York raised the interest rates from 5 to 6%. For that reason, investors declined their interest in stocks. The agricultural recession could be an additional reason for the stock market crash. According to some experts, because farmers were not able to keep their annual profit, it caused the agricultural slump.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Carole D. Bos, “Stock Market Crash of 1929 - Buying on Margin”, last modified October 24, 2015, <https://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Stock-Market-Crash-of-1929-Buying-on-Margin>.

<sup>18</sup> Julie Marks, “What Caused the Stock Market Crash of 1929?”, History, last modified April 13, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/what-caused-the-stock-market-crash-of-1929>.

## 2 CULTURAL CHANGES AND NEW WOMEN

### 2.1 Religion

Religion during the 1920s can be perceived as secularized, but there is also a lot of evidence that faith in religion increased. Catholic, Jewish or African American communities stuck to the traditionalism while Protestants were transforming the message of Christianity to the modern age, which resulted in a dispute between traditionalists and modernists. In the middle of the dispute, there appeared World War I's shocking bloodshed, expanding consumer and urban culture. According to historian Robert Handy, Americans evidently seemed to be in a "religious depression". Protestants and Jewish observed decreasing church attendance. The reduced support for missionary activities was another symptom of the "depression". Contributions to the church were lower, and in 1928 only 225 students were willing to be volunteers of foreign missionary service. According to Charles Finske, the materialistic nature and the pursuit of prosperity invaded religion itself.<sup>19</sup>

Religion was losing its position. Women's attitude towards family life, which originated in Victorian morals changed and the number of civil weddings and divorces increased. People preferred amusement over a church. Due the validity of the Sabbath observance laws, Churches had to compete with sports and cultural events that were organised. The Sabbath law determined business and amusement activities that can be implemented on Sunday. The crisis became more Protestant's. Although their campaign for moral reforms resulted in Prohibition, the impact and influence on public life during the 1920s slipped away. Decades of immigration modified the religious arrangement and, as a consequence, one-third of church members consisted of Catholics whereas only 5% were Jewish. It implied further secularization and difficulties to secure one particular set of beliefs. Another problem was arising interest in the history of humankind and world religion which has given the idea that religion is constructed socially and not given by God.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.2 Flappers: New female trend

The term "flapper" has its origin in England, where was used to describe teenage girls. However, Fitzgerald and other American authors have rooted this term in America to describe a boisterous life of a young spirit in women after World War I. This model soon became a female ideal. Flappers were characterized with "bob" haircuts – short cut hairstyle with a curl

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<sup>19</sup> Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, 170.

<sup>20</sup> Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, 171.



on each side of the face and expressive makeup. A decorative cosmetic that was most commonly used by women included eyeliner and lipstick. The dresses were loose so they could not stop women from wild dancing. Corsets and pantaloons were replaced by so-called “step-ins”. The length of the skirt rose a few inches up, but by the end of the 1920s, its length was just below the knee. They also preferred wearing stockings made of artificial silk.<sup>21</sup>

An example of this model of beauty was an actress Clara Bow, admired by many women as well as Zelda Fitzgerald. While the flapper women celebrities were admired by the young generation of American women, the older one considered them to be invaders of manner and morals set by the Victorian Era. Flapper’s appearance was daring and so did their behaviour. Inspired by Jazz music, women found a penchant for smoking and drinking. Smoking was rather a matter of men until then, however, they aimed to be different. Apart from this, smoking was not their most rebellious habit. Since America faced the drinking issues and Prohibition was in a full swing, even women were not an exception and enjoyed forbidden alcohol with a gulp. In the worst case scenario, some of them supported their drinking habit by carrying hip-flasks. Flappers liked to present themselves as a sex symbol and radical opposite of the female ideal of the previous generation. Eventually, those women became mothers in the following decade, however, till the time they preserved their romantic, innocent, sexy and young qualities. The decade of the 1920s is frequently called Jazz Age and the meaning explains the title itself. Jazz was popular music and Flappers liked to dance the Charleston, which, along with other popular dances, was considered to be wild by the older generations. Their behaviour was reckless and they wanted to enjoy their youth to the fullest as if someone could steal it from them.<sup>22</sup> Considering the music, Jazz borrowed its name to the period of the 1920s. Jazz music comes from New Orleans, which has been a multiracial and multi-ethnic city all the time and which raised famous trumpeters Louis Armstrong and Joe "King" Oliver.<sup>23</sup>

Although Flappers were wonderful solely for the younger generation, its less extreme version was accepted even by the old one. Some of the women just cut their hair and look a bit similar to them, which was more natural and acceptable. The end of the decade brought the arrival of an unpleasant period that nobody expected. The Great Depression slipped away the popularity and recklessness of flappers, but the rest stayed the same.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Rosenberg, “Flappers in the Roaring Twenties”, ThoughtCo, last modified January 15, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/flappers-in-the-roaring-twenties-1779240>.

<sup>22</sup> Rosenberg, “Flappers”.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *A History of the American People*, 702-

<sup>24</sup> Rosenberg, “Flappers”.

### 2.3 Women's suffrage amendment in 1920

Both men and women were affected by consumer culture, which changed the temperament of society and brought the expansion of mass media and reforms in politics and work. Women made an effort to change their stereotypical position in society, to fight for women's suffrage and engage in politics.

In the 1920s, women aimed to support the Progressive Era reform spirit to which they contributed to women's demand for a vote. Many women saw some practical advantages in the right to vote, this campaign attracted the attention of upper and middle-class women, working class women as well as black women. Even though they shared the same objectives, they did not cooperate as one unit. White women refused any cooperation with Black women, due to the fear and racial prejudices supported by "southern perceptions that expanding the suffrage to women would disrupt well-established black disenfranchisement in that region."<sup>25</sup> In 1914, Alice Paul formed the Congressional Union, which members protested in front of a white house. World War I was raging in the world, soldiers fought for democracy while women's democratic rights were rejected at home. Another group of women was the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA), which was established in 1890. The organization was more conservative and as the first one launched the national suffrage amendment campaign. Notwithstanding the women organizations consisted of a wide variety of women, their campaigns succeed, hence the 1920s federal amendment passed and the women suffrage spread throughout the nation.<sup>26</sup>

Women leaders entered a new decade with confidence and newly acquired responsibility, which led them to discussions about Democratic and Republican parties. Driven by an ambition to expand their influence they were considering whether to support any of the parties. Eventually, NAWSA was replaced by the League of Women Voters, which was a nonpartisan group further supporting women's engagement. Eventually, the National Woman's Party (NWP) was established and went on the mission of an equal rights amendment. Inasmuch as women became involved in Democratic as well as Republican party their enthusiasm was employed, and they were offered positions within the organizational structure of the parties. Only a few of them were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives,

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<sup>25</sup> Lynn Dumenil, "The New Woman and the Politics of the 1920s", *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, (July 200): 22.

<sup>26</sup> Dumenil, „The New Woman“, 22.

and none of them could join the Senate. Still, they could hold positions well suited for women, as secretaries of state and education.<sup>27</sup>

Women encouraged by the newly acquired power, continued in the Progressive Era objectives and lobbied for education and industrial reform, an extension of equal rights. Furthermore, some of the women's groups engaged in lobbying for disarmament and peace movements. The first attempt to limit the armament, which eventually did not succeed was in 1922, on the Washington Conference. Although women's legal rights extended during the 1920s their success in politics was limited. The fact that Congress did not accept a child labor amendment was a major failure. In effect, most of their engagements in support of any national legislation were unsuccessful, which consequently discouraged them from politics.<sup>28</sup>

For African American women, the suffrage signified hope and opportunity to draw attention to issues concerning them, such as lynching and sexual abuse of black women. Since the suffrage amendment was ratified, women commenced on voter registration campaign, specifically in the Southern states where most of the blacks lived, whilst the white southerners opposed them and denied "suffrage to black man-tax qualifications, educational tests, grandfather clauses, and harassment."<sup>29</sup> In comparison with white women's organizations which spread among the Republican and Democratic Party, black women were united and concentrated in the Republican Party. Black women standing for Republicans, in states outside the South engaged in campaigns to support candidates of Radical Reconstruction and later noticed Hoover's and Republicans lack interest in problems of black Americans. In the election of 1932, they still vote for Republicans, however, in 1934 gave vote to Democrats.<sup>30</sup> Within the 1920s women made great efforts to pursue their goals and have achieved many over their failures. They opened the door to opportunities for all women of future generations.

## 2.4 Racial prejudice and immigration

The Roaring Twenties are said to be a period of prosperity, liberalism, new inventions and fun. However, those who did not benefit from that period were African-Americans and immigrants. The decade observed the revival of nationalist and racist sentiment and the rising fear of immigration. The decade witnessed revival of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), an organization established in the 1860s to enforce white supremacy and therefore the nationalist

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<sup>27</sup> Dumenil, "The New Woman", 22-23.

<sup>28</sup> Dumenil, "The New Woman", 24.

<sup>29</sup> Dumenil, "The New Woman", 24.

<sup>30</sup> Dumenil, "The New Woman", 25.

and racist sentiment was very convenient for them.<sup>31</sup> The organization stood against immigrants, Jews who were persecuted in Eastern Europe, Catholics and blacks.<sup>32</sup> The Klan gained political influence and since immigration restrictions have been widely recognized, its existence has not been compromised. The number of the Klan members was rising and a year 1920 could count 6 million members, which that time was 5% of the population.<sup>33</sup>

As a solution to migration, the Immigration Act (The Johnson-Reed Act) enacted in 1924, set the number of immigrants allowed to stay in the States. With regard to visa which allowed only 2-3% of immigrants to stay, the Asian citizens were expelled. The aim of the Act was to preserve the homogeneity of U.S.<sup>34</sup> Regarding blacks, as a result of urbanization, they were moving from South to industrial North searching for work. Most of them chose to live in New York, Detroit, and Chicago. However, their lives became tough, because they had to face discrimination and exploitation. Unwilling to live under these conditions, many of them joined organizations like The National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) led by William du Bois. The purpose of the organization was to spread more knowledge about civil rights to African-Americans, lobby for the abolition of segregation and provide them with equality in education and suffrage. This organization investigated lynching cases and, by extending this crime to the public's subconscious, it successfully reduced its number. Another prominent organization was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), operating with slogans like "Black is beautiful", aiming at blacks to make them proud of their culture and history. Blacks had difficulties to get a job very often and therefore UNIA encouraged blacks to open their own businesses. Unexpectedly, the two organizations became foes to one another, through the usage of distinct methods.<sup>35</sup>

With regard to the Ku Klux Klan, 400 black citizens have become victims of lynching. The organization members enjoyed murdering, raping and violating the minorities. Their crimes were seldom punished because some positions in the political sphere were occupied by Klan members and anti-Semitism was so developed that even police officers were unwilling to help the victims and even worse, they helped the crime many times.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Bradley Phipps, "The roaring Twenties! But were 1920s a liberal or conservative period in the USA?," *History is Now*, February 9, 2014, <http://www.historyisnowmagazine.com/blog/2014/2/9/the-roaring-twenties-but-were-the-1920s-a-liberal-or-conservative-period-in-the-usa#.XKZCR1UzbIU=>.

<sup>32</sup> Dumenil, "The New Woman", 26.

<sup>33</sup> Phipps, "The roaring Twenties!"

<sup>34</sup> "Mile stones: 1921-1939", The Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act)", Office of the Historian, accessed April, 5, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>.

<sup>35</sup> "Life in the United States of America, 1920-33", Life for black Americans", BBC Bitesize, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/zpy8msg/revision/4>.

<sup>36</sup> BBC Bitesize, "Life for black".

### 3 PROHIBITION: IT'S BIRTH AND REPERCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 America's drinking experience

America was soaked in alcohol since its discovery. An English traveller Frederick Marryat commented on Americans in *A diary in America* that liquor is essential for the Americans — “If you meet, you drink; if you part, you drink; if you make acquaintance, you drink; if you close a bargain you drink; they quarrel in their drink, and they make it up with a drink.”<sup>37</sup> When John Winthrop landed in Massachusetts Bay colony in 1630 his ship carried more than ten thousand gallons of wine in its hold and three times as much beer as water. In 1722 Benjamin Franklin wrote a list of synonyms for “drunk” and provided several examples. In less than two decades Americans reached the number of more than fourteen thousands of distilleries.

In 1821, Harvard literature professor George Ticknor told Thomas Jefferson about his fear of continuously rising consumption of the liquor and Americans, who will eventually be considered as a nation of “sots”. In 1830, the consumption of alcohol per capita reached a number of seven gallons, which is about 90 bottles of liquor per adult person. Ticknor's fear was confirmed. At about the same time, the first anti-alcohol activists showed up and supported The Washingtonian Movement which did not cause any legislation change. It was simply a pact of six drinkers who signed the document and pledged their abstinence. Interestingly, Abraham Lincoln as an opponent of the idea of Prohibition in one of his speeches praised the activists for their persuasion. As one of the movements' adherents said — “They had changed many lives, through their mission of peace and love, but we also saw that large numbers who were saved by these means, fell back again to a lower position than ever, because the tempter was permitted to live and throw out his seductive toils. Out watchword now was, Prohibition!”<sup>38</sup>

#### 3.2 Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution

In 1893, Anti-Saloon league, an organization lobbying for legislation prohibiting the production and sale of alcohol in the United States, was established. It was supported by Protestant evangelical churches.<sup>39</sup> Their determination resulted in The Eighteenth Amendment, which successfully passed both chambers of the U.S. Congress in December

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<sup>37</sup> Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Okrent, *Last Call*, 9-10.

<sup>39</sup> Marco Sampaolo, “Anti-Saloon League, American Political Organization,” last modified Jan 6, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Anti-Saloon-League>.

1917 and it was ratified in January 1919. To support Prohibition, The National Prohibition Act, sometimes also called the Volstead Act, was valid from 1920 and likewise the amendment, it was enforcing to ban manufacture and sale of alcohol.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.3 Prohibition

The women started to call for Prohibition in 1873 when Dr. Dioclesian Lewis delivered his speech in Hillsboro, Ohio and pleaded local women to use the power of prayer to dispose of saloons. The next morning seventy-five women gathered in church, to preach on the subject of alcohol. The daughter of an Ohio governor, Elizabeth Jane Trimble Thompson, was chosen as a leader. She guided her group to saloons and drugstores where they prayed or sing. Sometimes they were so influential that the owners would swear to leave the business and as a consequence, those women persuaded nine out of the thirteen saloon owners to close in Hillsboro. Despite the success which managed to collect on taxes more than \$300,000 and spread to several corners of the country their effort did not last.<sup>41</sup>

The idea of Prohibition was supported also by racists, progressives, suffragists, populists, nativists and served those groups to assert their ideologies. However, the Prohibition tendency was most convenient for racists. According to an official publication of the Methodist Church, legal slavery protected Negroes from the alcohol's evil effects. Another publication called "Colliers" claimed that the moral responsibility lies with the whites and therefore the legal drinking is against their duty. In the novels written by Thomas Dixon Jr., the Negroes are pictured as some monsters able to rape, driven by a lust for whiskey and invading white's homes. The Prohibition in the way it was ratified was preceded by three waves, as C. Vann Woodward called it, and this "negro threat" was the third of them.<sup>42</sup>

Alexander Hamilton, finance minister, considered liquor to be vital for democracy, nevertheless he intended taxing alcohol, which he hoped to result in discouragement from drinking. This idea how to defeat the alcohol abuse appeared to be effective and as a result, it was supported by Richmond Hobson in the House of Representatives in 1913, who suggested setting the taxes on alcohol so high that the consequence could be the trade collapse.<sup>43</sup>

The Prohibition was supposed to be a solution to the insanity of the alcohol but it failed in several ways. It violated some fundamental principles in American history such as freedom of enterprise and besides that, it increased a crime wave as well. The undesirable consequence

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<sup>40</sup> "Volstead Act," Britannica, last modified Aug 11, 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Volstead-Act>.

<sup>41</sup> Okrent, *Last Call*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Okrent, *Last Call*, 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> Okrent, *Last Call*, 53.

was that it turned sale because the distribution of liquor and its manufacture altered from licit to crime.<sup>44</sup>

In Chicago, in 1920 the criminality flourished. John Torrio made a fortune of \$30 million by bootlegging and his successful criminal career inspired many others. The impact of Prohibition, as journalist Walter Lippett suggests, was huge. 4000 bootleggers supplied 700 speakeasies in Washington DC, which used to have about 300 bars.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, in New York, the speakeasies were situated along 52<sup>nd</sup> Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. There were even more luxurious places which allowed to be entered only by people from the upper class, with a membership card. The most exclusive was The Twenty-one Club, offering expensive drinks and a company of Broadway and Hollywood stars.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *A History of the American People*, 680.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *A History of the American People*, 681-682.

<sup>46</sup> Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America*, (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003), 102.

## 4 THE GREAT GATSBY

The novel saw the light of day for the first time in April 1925. *Careless People* written by Sarah Churchwell, suggests that *The Great Gatsby* is a very exceptional novel about the jazz-age and Fitzgerald's insight into society as well as a foreshadowing of its decline. Fitzgerald was able to depict the life of that time with all its fun and frolicking. As it was the beginning of the end, it was also "...a season of changes, a time of turmoil and reinvention for all the participants."<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly, the subject and inspiration for Fitzgerald's writing was not only the society of that time but rather his life experience. Nevertheless, he knew that a certain portion of imagination is also necessary. The setting of the story is inspired by Fitzgerald's short staying in Great Neck. In terms of the characters of *The Great Gatsby*, he got inspired by real human beings such as Arnold Rothstein. The character Meyer Wolfsheimer was based on the man, about whom people heard only rumours. Gatsby's character is based on some Long Island bootlegger that Fitzgerald hardly knew. Gatsby might appear as an imitation of Fitzgerald himself to readers since both of them were not born to a rich family and that both had to achieve success to become "someone" and then reunite with the true love which comes from a wealthy family in both cases, but he is definitely not. However, the most important character remains the narrator Nick Carraway. He not only narrates the story, but he also acts as a moral compass that observes and comments on all the events.<sup>48</sup> He reveals his feelings and thoughts about other characters and also provides the reader with a retrospective insight into the life of some of the characters through listening some of their stories told straight to him. His narration describes a summer in Long Island and New York in 1922.

### 4.1 F. Scott Fitzgerald's biography

F. Scott Fitzgerald, in full name Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald, was an American short-story writer and novelist. He was born to Edward and Mary Fitzgerald on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota and passed away as a fairly young man at age 44, on December 21, 1940, Hollywood, California. His death was caused by a heart attack which could be brought up by the alcohol abuse Fitzgerald suffered from.<sup>49</sup> His father had come from Minnesota to

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<sup>47</sup> Sarah Churchwell, *Careless People: Murder, Mayhem and the Invention of The Great Gatsby*, (London: Hachette Digital, 2013), 2-7, Kindle.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (United States: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 184-186.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur Mizener, "F. Scott Fitzgerald", last modified Jan 31, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/F-Scott-Fitzgerald>.



Maryland, traded with wicker furniture and in 1890 he married Scott's mother Mary, who came from an Irish grocer's family. Soon after their marriage, they lost not only two children in epidemics, but Edward's business as well. In spite of their failures, Edward became a salesman for Procter & Gamble. However, even this time he was not employed too long and when he was dismissed, the whole family moved back to St. Paul. Scott's father became a pensioner and owing to a rich aunt, Scott gained tuition at Newman's, a Catholic prep school in New Jersey and finally at Princeton. As a result of the unstable family situation, Scott was afraid to fall into poverty, which formed him into a very ambitious man.

His first writing attempts resulted in skits and lyrics for Princeton's Triangle Club musicals. The first love experience begun with Ginevra King who was a beautiful debutant from Lake Forest and his infatuation did not last very long. He used this experience for writing because she married a man who possessed polo ponies and he attributed this fact also to Daisy, who married Tom, owner of a string of polo ponies.

Fitzgerald entered World War I. as a second lieutenant and in the leisure time, he continued to write a novel *The Romantic Egoist* that he has started during his studies. In spite of the belief that he is going to die in the war, he left unharmed and sent the manuscripts to Scribner. Being rejected, he encountered the first failure of his beginning career. Apart from this, it was not the only one rejection that he received from Scribner.

In summer 1918, Fitzgerald met the love of his life. He was transferred near to Montgomery, Alabama, where he met Zelda Sayre, the daughter of an Alabama Supreme court judge. In 1919, Fitzgerald was discharged from the army wishing to marry Zelda, who rejected him, because of his lack of money and uncertain vision of the future. It brought him to New York, where he worked as a copywriter for \$90 per month.<sup>50</sup> Later after Zelda received an engagement ring, she broke the bond. He returned back to St. Paul and finished his work, which was retitled to *This Side of Paradise* and sent it to Max Perkins.<sup>51</sup> The novel was published in 1920 and Fitzgerald eventually married Zelda.<sup>52</sup> "Scott having become a celebrity, the Fitzgeralds went on a roller coaster ride of glamorous Long Island partying, trips to Paris, unbuttoned high jinks, lavish entertaining, and notorious debaucheries that kept Scott emotionally and financially strapped."<sup>53</sup>, says Arnold Shaw, author of a book *The Jazz Age: Popular Music in the 1920s*.

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<sup>50</sup> Nathan Miller, *New World Coming*, 6-8.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, *New World Coming*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Britannica, „F. Scott Fitzgerald“.

<sup>53</sup> Arnold Shaw, *The Jazz age: Popular Music in the 1920s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

## 4.2 Plot summary

The story takes place in the summer of 1922 on the east coast of America, on Long Island. It begins with the introduction of the narrator Nick Carraway, who is moving from the west to Long Island's West Egg. On the other side of the bay is the East Egg, where Nick's distant cousin Daisy lives. Daisy is married to Tom Buchanan, who comes from a very wealthy family and he is Nick's friend from university. When Nick joins Buchanan for a dinner, he meets with the golf player Jordan Baker. The dinner is interrupted by a ringing phone and Nick becomes acquainted with the irreversible truth that Tom has a mistress.

One afternoon Nick goes with Tom to New York by a train. The railroad is lined with a dirty, dusty environment called Valley of Ashes supervised by eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which are blue and gigantic. At this place he, meets George Wilson and his wife Myrtle, who is Tom's mistress. Myrtle is asked to spend an afternoon in a secret apartment in New York. When they arrive, Nick meets Myrtle's sister Cathrine and he witnesses entertainment, alcohol, smoking, as well as harsh quarrels between Myrtle and Tom.

On Saturday early morning, Nick receives an invitation from Mr. Gatsby, delivered by his chauffeur. The honour would be entirely Gatsby's if Nick would attend his "little party" that night. Nick decides to meet Mr. Gatsby and wearing white flannels he joins the party. During the night Nick finally meets his neighbour and he is invited to join a ride in his new hydroplane. One day in July Gatsby appears in front of Nick's humble house and they set off to New York for a lunch. The following day Gatsby reunites with his genuine love Daisy at Nick's place and the same day after the reunion everyone is going on for a tour of the Gatsby's mansion. Daisy is amazed by all his property and since then, she visits Gatsby every afternoon.

The following day both gentlemen come to East Egg and due to unbearable heat, joined by Daisy with her husband and Jordan they leave to spend the afternoon in the parlour of the suite in the Plaza Hotel. When they all arrive in the apartment, which is filled with heat, after nonsensical conversations, the atmosphere is charged with tension which results in a serious conversation between Tom and Gatsby. Gatsby avails himself of the situation and reveals that Daisy has never loved Tom. The utterance is denied by Daisy's husband and the argument between the two foes begins, although it is disturbed by Daisy's attempts to convince the rest of them to leave back home. Thereafter Daisy at the request of Tom drives back to Long Island alongside Gatsby in his car. At the moment when the rest of them is driving back home in Tom's coupé, it is already revealed that Tom's mistress is dead. She was knocked down by Gatsby's car and Daisy was a driver.

The following day, Gatsby decides to go for a swim for the first time of that summer and holding a mattress he goes towards the pool. He is shot dead by Wilson, who is the husband of Tom's dead mistress Myrtle and who himself commits suicide afterwards. Their bodies are found in Gatsby's garden by his staff and Nick. The following days, as a good friend, Nick tries to contact all the close people whom Gatsby knew, and takes care of the funeral. However, the only person who shows some interest is Gatsby's father. After the funeral, with the coming autumn, Nick decides to return to the West but before he leaves he looks around the Gatsby's mansion and remembers all the events of that summer for the last time.

### 4.3 Meaning of the automobiles in the novel

The novel comprises many references to the automobiles. Fitzgerald was aware of the fact how important means of transportation the cars became, but still the fact, that he depicts them rather negatively is more notable. Presumably, his aim was not to criticize them as they provide a quick and comfortable means for transport but he rather viewed them as a "large social ill."<sup>54</sup>

Many scholars have studied colour symbolism in *The Great Gatsby* and one specific colour is also related to Gatsby's car. Gatsby's car has a yellow colour, which is according to Daniel Schneider "the symbol of money, the crass materialism that corrupts the dream and ultimately destroys it," as he suggests in an article "Colour Symbolism of *The Great Gatsby*." Moreover, he points out that "the dream" means desire to win Daisy's love and since she is obsessed with wealth and luxury, his car is deliberately yellow coloured.

The narration highlights, besides the yellow colour, also a colour of Tom Buchanan's coupe—blue. According to Schneider, Fitzgerald attributes the colour to "symbolize a romantic idealism, a continuation of the white imagery that denotes Gatsby's dream." Meaning, that if the blue colour stands for the dreamed image of Gatsby and Daisy together the blue needs to symbolize Tom. Above that, Gatsby desires to become Tom, because he is Daisy's husband.<sup>55</sup> Since the novel is concerned with social status, the cars reflect the socio-economic status of its owners. Gatsby is the owner of Rolls Royce, which Tom describes as a "circus wagon", and Dan Seitters, an author of a study *Image Patterns in the Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, views Gatsby as "one who formed his ideals as a teenager and never questioned

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<sup>54</sup> Jacqueline Lance. "The Great Gatsby: Driving to Destruction with the Rich and Careless at the Wheel." *Studies in Popular Culture* 23, no. 2 (2000): 25-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23414542>.

<sup>55</sup> Lance, "The Great Gatsby", 26.

them again.”<sup>56</sup> According to Seiters, Gatsby is trying to show his wealth by the automobile, even though he actually unwittingly presents his status as an outsider. While Gatsby possesses Rolls Royce, George Wilson as a car mechanic with own garage is represented by “the dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner.”<sup>57</sup> Wilson is a man covered in the dust of the Valley of Ashes, without any particular success and with the sign on his garage saying “Repairs. Cars bought and sold.”<sup>58</sup> The inscription indicates that he is unable to repair his car, neither the miserable and exhausting life with his wife. On the contrary Daisy and Tom Buchanan possess two cars, which are not further described and only differ from the rest of the mentioned cars by the colour. The choice of Buchanan’s cars also reflects their welfare and satisfaction with the social status and also that they do not need to present their wealth to the outside.<sup>59</sup>

Another owner of an unobtrusive car is Nick Carraway, who does not describe his car too much but he reveals that he possesses “an old Dodge”.<sup>60</sup> This car symbolizes social and economic status as well. In the first chapter, Nick narrates about his family and the coming to the East Egg, where he rents a bungalow and starts his career in the bond business. The humble and functional automobile represents Nick’s reliability, respectfulness and his positive attitude to his family.<sup>61</sup>

Not only the colours but also the driving attitude discloses the character’s nature. Evidently, those who drive the most carelessly act recklessly also towards the ones they love or interact with. Tom Buchanan, as Jordan Baker reports to Nick, besides having a mistress at that time, after his honeymoon with Daisy he “ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night and ripped a front wheel off his car”<sup>62</sup> where he was accidentally also with his mistress from Santa Barbara Hotel. Tom is obviously one of the careless, but with regard to the fact that Daisy killed Myrtle by a car, makes her the most careless character in the novel. This is just one accident caused by her driving the car, but by the act, she actually caused the death of two other people, though not intentionally. However, she did not stop, she did not care about what she has done and she even let Gatsby be the one who is responsible for what happened. Undoubtedly she takes advantage of Gatsby’s affection, which dampens the inferiority she

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<sup>56</sup> Lance, “The Great Gatsby“, 26.

<sup>57</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 27.

<sup>58</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 27.

<sup>59</sup> Lance, “The Great Gatsby“, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Lance, “The Great Gatsby“, 27.

<sup>62</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 75.

feels due to Tom and his affairs. Then she tries to shake Gatsby off because he can disrupt her otherwise perfect existence.<sup>63</sup>

Leo Marx in his book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* deals with the question of why Fitzgerald used the car as “a tool of death”. Marx observes that technological development disconnects people from nature and that people long for a rural setting, so the automobiles are as a consequence “littering the countryside with its unsightly gas stations, clogging the roadways, and providing Americans with a new leading cause of premature death.”<sup>64</sup> Automobiles that penetrate the nature depict the decline of society, the society in which wealth is crucial, by which they define the value of a man. John Kuehl in his study "Scott Fitzgerald: Romantic and Realist" supports Marx's view that the automobiles play an important role in the novel, and that industrialization and technology are destroying the landscape that Fitzgerald calls the Valley of Ashes. Kuehl also claims that by the words that Fitzgerald lent to Nick in the passages where he describes the landscape, he points to his belief in "lost America" and therefore Nick imagines that he can see through the eyes of Dutch sailors the idealized pastoral landscape over which people took control and which beauty was profaned by urbanization and industrial pollution.<sup>65</sup>

“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 breathing the presence of this continent compelled;...”<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.4 Consumer culture

The idea of consumer culture is based on the fact that people demonstrate their social status and their values by clothes, hobbies, and things they buy. *The Great Gatsby* depicts social status, money, property, love, and a spoiled higher society that cares for itself only. This society, which is selfish, is presented by Tom and Daisy in particular. As Nick narrates in the final chapter; "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- they smashed up things and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and the other people clean up the mess they had made."<sup>67</sup> All the mentioned aspects collectively form the satire of consumer culture.

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<sup>63</sup> Lance, “The Great Gatsby“, 29.

<sup>64</sup> Lance, “The Great Gatsby“, 31.

<sup>65</sup> Lance, “The Great Gatsby“, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 171.

<sup>67</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 170.

Jay Gatsby, who is a representative of an American dream which means that everyone, wherever they come from, any kind of race or social status, can achieve success and happiness through hard work, has modified the rule, so that money is what makes a person "someone". This probably also comes from Fitzgerald's personal experience, when he came from poor conditions and his love, Zelda, refused to marry him till he becomes famous and provide her with financial background. Gatsby cannot achieve the dream eventually, meaning Daisy can, even though he believes that he needs to gain wealth to win her back. He purchased "imitation of some of the Hotel de Ville in Normandy" with "marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden"<sup>68</sup> and with all of that, he can provide her a house suited to her social status. The narration provides passages that Gatsby shows off his property. "An hour later the front door opened nervously, and Gatsby, in a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-coloured tie, hurried in."<sup>69</sup> His expansive clothes indicate high social status and he wants Daisy to see it, but the thing that his clothing is unable to disclose is the fact that he is just an ordinary criminal. One can purchase luxury things, but things do not need to represent the truth about his life or status. Gatsby is so obsessed with the idea of winning Daisy back by being wealthy that he spends his life building himself up. Even the money, status or the mansion he purchased was not enough to win her back, because even though this culture considers money and property being the most important, they are not. Money cannot buy love. Nick knows that and he sees that Gatsby wasted his life concentrated on the only one thing that eventually could not reach. "I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come and perhaps he no longer cared. 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."<sup>70</sup>

Daisy demonstrates her obsession with luxury when reunites with Gatsby and he takes her and Nick on a tour of his mansion. There is a moment during the tour, Gatsby opens his "patent cabinets which held massed suits and dressing gowns and ties, and his shirts, piled like bricks in stacks a dozen high"<sup>71</sup> and he throws them before Nick and Daisy. This makes her cry. "They're such beautiful shirts,"... she says, "It makes me sad because I've never seen such – such beautiful shirts before."<sup>72</sup> This quote demonstrates her possession towards to consumerism. Expensive and beautiful shirts can make her cry but all these are useless things that will be replaced by new ones over time. They do not last forever.

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<sup>68</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 153.

<sup>71</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 89.

Nick Carraway is the only character that was born into wealth. However, he is not obsessed with it. He rents a bungalow when he moves to East, possesses “an old Dodge”<sup>73</sup> and tries to learn a bond business. On the contrary, Tom with Daisy likes to appear where there is money. At the beginning of the novel, they travel and prefer places “wherever people played polo and were rich together”<sup>74</sup> and they moved to West Egg, to residents of the rich, and because they have the money, they can leave with equanimity at the end of the novel. The last character to enjoy consumer culture is Tom's mistress Myrtle. Since Wilson cannot give her the luxury she requires whereas Tom can. When Tom with Myrtle and Nick arrived in New York “At the news-stand, she bought a copy of *Town Tattle* and a moving-picture magazine, and in the drug-store station some cold cream and a small flask of perfume.”<sup>75</sup> She also longs for a dog, which Tom buys her on the way to their rented apartment.

All the above-mentioned quotes point to the omnipresence of money, which the characters consider for a source of happiness. Even though that for some of them they mediate life in luxury, at the same time overshadow they mind because money cannot buy happiness. Outwardly, they try to look cultivated and wealthy but they only hide their own secrets and problems.

#### 4.5 Flashes of the Prohibition in the novel

In chapter 3, Nick describes the spectacular parties which his neighbour Jay Gatsby throws. Although the sale or consumption of alcohol is forbidden, Gatsby possess means how to satisfy his guests and the following quote suggests that the parties threw in his mansion provides alcohol for free and for everyone, “In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.”<sup>76</sup> Not only the spectacular parties suggest drinking of the liquor in a bulk, but Jordan Baker's statement in chapter 4 by which she describes Daisy, shows a certain level of alcohol abuse. “It's a great advantage not to drink among hard-drinking people.”<sup>77</sup> Gatsby, on the other hand, drinks a very little. “It was indirectly due to Cody, that Gatsby drank so little. Sometimes in the course of gay parties,

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<sup>73</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 41-42.

<sup>77</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 75.

women used to rub champagne into his hair; for himself he formed the habit of letting liquor alone.”<sup>78</sup>

According to Miller, the largest cities ignored Prohibition and in large-scale produced beer and liquor, which supplied the streets of dilapidated houses or dark alleys, which served as a perfect place for secret bars called speakeasies. Speakeasies were hidden behind inconspicuous places such as grocery or another type of shop and they allowed entry through a basement door or sliding panel.<sup>79</sup> Nick is invited to one of these speakeasies, indicating the sentence “In well-fanned Forty Second Street cellar I met Gatsby for lunch.”<sup>80</sup>

In chapter 7, Nick spends one hot summer afternoon in the parlour of Plaza Hotel with Jordan Baker, Tom, Gatsby and Daisy. However, before they leave to New York, Daisy who is used to the omnipresence of alcohol suggests taking something to drink—“Shall we take anything to drink?”<sup>81</sup> “I’ll get some whiskey,”<sup>82</sup> replies Tom. When the plot moves to the parlour of Plaza Hotel, the situation among the participants is getting a little stuffy and Daisy offers a drink to Tom in order to calm him down, which indicates that these people are unable to stay sober and face the emotions without alcohol — “Open the whisky, Tom, and I’ll make you a mint julep. Then you won’t seem so stupid to yourself.”<sup>83</sup> Daisy said. The conversation continues and Gatsby’s true “occupation” follows the surface. Tom reveals the truth about Gatsby’s illegal activity. “I found out what your “drug-stores” were. He and his Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side-street drug-stores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That’s one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn’t far wrong.”<sup>84</sup> The presence of the Prohibition is unquestionable. It did not stop people from drinking and it allowed Gatsby with Wolfshiem and his partners to make a lot of money in an illegal business.

#### 4.6 Flappers and role of women in the novel

Fitzgerald depicts new women of the 20th century through the female characters. Even though each of the characters is different, Jordan Baker, Daisy Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson are the symbol of the new era which set off by giving the women a right to vote. All of these women are in the interest of the men and they are not always depicted positively. Jordan Baker is the

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<sup>78</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 97.

<sup>79</sup> Miller, *New World Coming*, 101.

<sup>80</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 114.

<sup>82</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 114.

<sup>83</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 123.

<sup>84</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 127.



most obvious character who represents the new women of 1920s. She is described as very attractive for Nick.<sup>85</sup> “She is arrogant, unemotional, and often irresponsible.”<sup>86</sup> She is the character who is criticized by Fitzgerald. He points out the critic of the traditional women and the theme of a damsel in distress. Daisy abandoned her love for Gatsby and fell for Tom with whom she started a new life because he is rich and he can provide her financial security. Nevertheless, she possesses some of the Flapper qualities. Meaning that she keeps herself distant from her daughter and she does not take any responsibility for her actions. She is the symbol of an old woman transforming into a new one with new values.<sup>87</sup>

There are two ways of how a reader can perceive her relationship with her daughter. One option is, that she does not really care much about the child and second that she is disappointed by giving birth to a girl. Nick asks about her – “I suppose she talks, and – eats, and everything,”<sup>88</sup> and Daisy replies, that when she gave birth to the child, she asked whether it is a boy or girl. When she finds out it was a girl, she said: “I hope she’ll be a fool – that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.”<sup>89</sup> Her statement indicates her cynicism towards the world and her perception that woman’s life role is to be stupid and beautiful. In Gatsby’s eyes, Daisy has a “voice full of money”<sup>90</sup> and he loved her the way she was, however money and the new lifestyle changed her. At the moment when she stays between two men and is confronted to choose the one she eventually ends up with the one who is cheating her. It is Tom. She wants to stay with him despite the fact that it is not an ideal marriage and she stays with him because of the financial security that he can provide for her.<sup>91</sup>

Morals before the 1920s set woman to be the one who takes care of the children and husband and her place was to stay at home. The 1920s brought up a new concept of woman and these morals changed. They become more careless and unfaithful when it comes to their families. They started to think more about their own prosperity. Myrtle is the woman who cheats on her husband with Tom. Daisy cheats on her husband with Gatsby. “He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his

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<sup>85</sup> Maia Samkanashvili, “The Role of Women in the Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald”, *Journal in Humanities*, 47.

<sup>86</sup> Samkanashvili, “The Role of Women”, 47.

<sup>87</sup> Samkanashvili, “The Role of Women”, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 21

<sup>89</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 115.

<sup>91</sup> Samkanashvili, “The Role of Women”, 47.

mind would never romp again like the mind of God.<sup>92</sup> The romance between Gatsby and Daisy is different from Myrtle and Tom's. Their love was once built and they continue loving each other after many years. Going back to this relationship proves her unfaithfulness to Tom.

Disloyalty can be observed in Jordan Baker's behaviour. She is a friend of Daisy who knows, that her husband has a mistress, however, she does not tell her. Not telling her friend such an important fact is perceived as a betrayal of their friendship. All the female characters are unfaithful in the novel and each of them in their own way. Each of those involved in the infidelity had its own motive. Myrtle was blinded by the gifts she received and luxurious stuff she was surrounded by thanks to Tom so she could not see that he is not in love with her. He was just using her. However, Daisy is a fool, too. She married Tom instead of waiting for Gatsby. Even though she is dissatisfied in her marriage, she is unable to leave it behind and stays with Tom. At that time, a man had power over his wife. It can be observed by Tom's aggressiveness when he argues with Myrtle in the Plaza Hotel room. In the case of Daisy, he does not use physical violence but he is convinced and he boasts that she will never leave him.<sup>93</sup>

#### 4.7 Social class disparity and shadows of racism in the novel

The first mention of White Race's superiority appears right at the beginning of the story when Nick is having dinner with Buchannans and Jordan Baker. Tom is interested in a book *The Rise of the Coloured Empires* written by Goddard and he suggests that the white race is superior. "This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things."<sup>94</sup> And we've produced all the things that go to make civilization – oh, science and art, and all that."<sup>95</sup> Tom hints at the fact that the white race did not want blacks to produce any kind of art. In this sense, the blacks were discriminated. During the dinner, there is a moment when Tom says "This idea is that we're Nordics."<sup>96</sup> Tom suggests by this statement White Race's superiority once again.<sup>97</sup>

From the narration, it is obvious that Daisy, as well as Tom, comes from a wealthy family. They never had to make an effort to become rich because the wealth was given to

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<sup>92</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 107.

<sup>93</sup> Samkanashvili, "The Role of Women", 48.

<sup>94</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 18.

<sup>95</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 18.

<sup>96</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 18.

<sup>97</sup> Slater, Peter Gregg. "Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby." *Twentieth Century Literature* 19, no. 1 (1973): 53-62, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/440797?read-now=1&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/440797?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

them. They belong to the upper class, however, Gatsby, on the other hand, is a self-made man. He was not born into richness. When Gatsby's father arrives at the funeral of his son and talks to Nick, he shows him a book that belonged to Gatsby. The book is called *Hopalong Cassidy*. Nick opens it and sees a note written by Gatsby, which describes his day plan on September 12. Each activity was precisely timed. He had his own plan on how to become successful. Outside the activity, there are his resolves, his personal goals. It is clear from Gatsby's note that he worked hard on his personality and his father also confirms that his son has always been committed to become successful. "Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that."<sup>98</sup> Gatsby believed in the American Dream and he believed in the idea that everyone can become successful. It is not important where a person was born or which ethnicity the person is. The important thing is that everyone who works hard and chases his dreams is able to make them happen.

The afternoon in the Plaza Hotel Tom argues with Gatsby and attacks him with words concerning his social class. "Mr. Nobody from Nowhere."<sup>99</sup> Tom continues in his monologue saying "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."<sup>100</sup> He tries to humiliate Gatsby and make him look like he is inferior and not good enough for Daisy. In the second quote, he repeatedly shows his racial intolerance to the blacks. However, it must be added that Tom is not the only one who points out social-class differences. Nick as the narrator tends to describe the people who are not of Old American ethnicity. He is part of the upper middle class and he sees the differences between him and the people in the lower class.<sup>101</sup> He describes his Finish servant as the one who "muttered Finnish wisdom to herself over the electric stove."<sup>102</sup> On the way to New York, he visits the Valley of Ashes and comments on a child he sees "A grey, scrawny Italian child was setting torpedoes in a row along the railroad track."<sup>103</sup> At the moment of Myrtle's death, he characterizes the witness of the accident as "The young Greek, Michaelis, who ran the coffee joint beside the ash

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<sup>98</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 164.

<sup>99</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 123.

<sup>100</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 124.

<sup>101</sup> Slater, "Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby", 55.

<sup>102</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.

<sup>103</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 29.

heaps.”<sup>104</sup> Even though Nick comments on people of different ethnicity he also recognizes people that he puts into the special class which he created in his mind.<sup>105</sup>

As one of those exceptions, he considers George B. Wilson who runs a garage in the Valley of Ashes. He struggles economically, and he is a blonde hair middle-class man with blue eyes. He reminds of the previous president and symbolizes vanity and the defeat of 1925. Nick’s perception of ethnicity is based on socioeconomic status and despite of income manners or physical shapes of other people he eventually finds the ones of his type to be the superior.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 129.

<sup>105</sup> Slater, “Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby”, 54-55.

<sup>106</sup> Slater, “Ethnicity in The Great Gatsby”,

## CONCLUSION

The 1920s was a period that has forever written into the history of Americans. The aftermath brought economic prosperity as well as its fall, changes in morals and new options for women. World War I slightly touched the American continent and people knowing what was happening in Europe became grateful for their lives. The economy was doing well and newly established companies and inventions flourished. People took everything the market offered – vacuum cleaners, toasters, radios or canned food. The horses were replaced by cars in the city streets.

Women won the right to vote and became more engaged in politics. With the rise of Flappers their morals changed and they enjoyed the opportunity to change the established morals of the Victorian era. Blacks were discriminated and they had to overcome many obstacles in form of racial prejudices. Prohibition did not change as much as it intended and people enjoyed alcohol, Flappers, Jazz music and dance in hidden speakeasies.

Fitzgerald being disgusted by newly coined social preferences wrote a novel which depicts the social changes that hurt himself the most. In the novel, there are a lot of autobiographical elements which indicates the realness of the characters and their properties. The author displays new women and changed morals in form of the female characters. He points out consumer society which turned to leisure and sports. Furthermore, he points out the problem with the destruction of nature due to the flourishing industry in the form of valley of ashes and he chooses cars as a modern killing machine. Thanks to his rich experience with alcohol and amusement, he was able to include in the story spectacular parties hosted by one of the characters. Differences in social class play crucial role. There are characters of different origins. The plot has similarities to the author's life. At first sight, a reader might find the narrator's voice to be solely Fitzgerald's. However, he is more likely to be a pattern for Gatsby's character. The narrator, Nick Carraway, is given voice by the writer who uses him as the critic and observer of the 1920s society. In each situation, he stands almost silently and he just observes and comments on actions the characters take. He is told stories which he then retells and in the form of flashbacks he reveals details of the characters' past which catch up with them in present. The novel describes selfishness and carelessness of the upper-class members, in the same way as Fitzgerald perceived his surroundings. Everyone wants to live happily and well and those who put an effort to tackle their dreams are not able to catch them eventually. The same happens in reality. The plot is intertwined with the idea of the American Dream which no one tackles, perhaps only the wealthy ones who do not care about anything.

The author however, is not concentrated with all the issues of the 1920s. While the novel comes up against racism, it omits the immigration problem or religion.

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