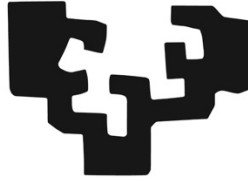


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*THE GREAT GATSBY: AN ANALYSIS OF
THE AMERICAN DREAM*

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ABSTRACT

The American Dream and its relation to the American literary production is a subject that has been exposed to detailed study throughout time. In order to contribute to this field of studies, this paper will analyze the representation of the American Dream in one of the most significant novels of American literature, F.S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. First, the essay will put in context the notion of the American Dream and the type of literature that is going to be analyzed. Afterwards, and conducted from a cultural perspective, the analysis of the Dream will be done regarding four different aspects of the novel: first of all, how the Dream distributes in space; after that, how the Dream is related to time, to the Roaring Twenties; then, the Dream's connection to class and the differences amongst the several social classes that appear on the novel; and finally, how gender and the notion of the Dream combine together. This way of approaching the study will show how the Dream works differently for the characters in the novel depending on several characteristics, such as class, gender and status; in other words, the paper will show the discordance of the Dream and its drawbacks based on Fitzgerald's portrayal of the Roaring Twenties.

Key words: *The Great Gatsby*, Roaring 20s, American Dream, class, gender, space.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE AMERICAN DREAM AND <i>THE GREAT GATSBY</i>	5
2.1. THE AMERICAN DREAM: A LOOK OVER TIME	5
2.2. <i>THE GREAT GATSBY</i> : WHAT TYPE OF TEXT IS IT?	7
3. ANALYSIS OF THE DREAM IN THE NOVEL	8
3.1. THE DREAM AND TIME.....	8
3.2. THE DREAM AND SPACE	12
3.3. THE DREAM AND CLASS	14
3.4. THE DREAM AND GENDER	18
4. CONCLUSION.....	21

1. Introduction

The main aim of the present paper is to conduct an analysis of the representation of The American Dream and its manifestation and integration in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*, focusing on the notion of the Dream during the Roaring Twenties' circumstances and conception.

Overall, three are the motivations for having chosen this topic: firstly, the important role played by *The Great Gatsby* in the continuation of the idea of a palpable American Dream. Secondly, the novel's unequivocal significance and importance with regards to portraying the American society's characteristics, economic and cultural essence. And in relation to the second motivation, the third reason is the novel's display of a close and biting criticism of the American Dream.

Many articles have been published on Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and the topic of the American Dream. Nevertheless, this essay attempts to prove that the Dream is not a unique notion equally applicable and reachable for each and every individual; instead, the Dream is presented as a complex and mutable phenomenon that changes its state depending on the individual that it is being fitted to. In order to credit this statement a system of sections and subsections has been prepared, which is explained below.

The paper consists of four main sections, being the first one this very introduction. The second section will be devoted to the contextualization of the 1920s –the American Dream, the Myth of the West and the self-made man before and throughout the Golden Years– and to the explanation of the novel's nature –characteristics of the novel will be scrutinized and put in context with the time of its publication–. The third section is the substantial segment of the essay: with reference to the aforementioned notion of the American Dream, the analysis and dissection of the novel are accomplished, taking into consideration the different realities that the Dream offers within Fitzgerald's production. For this part, four different sub-topics will be presented: 3.1 the Dream and space; 3.2 the Dream and time; 3.3 the Dream and class and 3.4 the Dream and gender. Lastly, the final

section will be devoted to the conclusion of the paper which will summarize and recollect the main ideas explained throughout the text.

2. Historical Background: The American Dream and *The Great Gatsby*

2.1. The American Dream: A Look Over Time

The American Dream is basically the belief that anything an individual can imagine is achievable in the US territory if hard work and determination are combined. Other definitions regarding the Dream are: “a widely used catchphrase for the ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom upon which the United States was founded.” and amongst many others “the American Way of Life; American culture or society” (Keller 70). However, the credit for the term “American Dream” goes to James Truslow Adam, who coined the term in 1931 in his book *The Epic of America*. Truslow stated that the American Dream is:

That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement ... a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.(214-215)

This notion of achievability dates back to the days of the Europeans stumbling upon the American continent; escaping from Europe dreaming of a better life, the North American land seemed like an ideal place for a new beginning. As Jürg P. Keller explained, besides political motivations, the wish to gain religious freedom, to obtain a larger acreage or to accomplish and be able to perform personal ideals, motivated those first arrivals to the North American land (52). Time after those first settlements, in the year 1776, the Declaration of Independence materialized the Dream and had it legally framed and captured under these words: ‘all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness’ (Jefferson). The unalienable notion of these Rights, and

especially the approach to the “pursuit of Happiness” sweetened the American Dream, converting it into an “almost sacred promise” (Ghamesi and Tiur 122). (A promise *in* which and *for* which everyone “has the right, and often the duty, to try to succeed and to do his best to reach the top” (Warner et al. 67).

However, the aspect of the Dream has changed over the course of time: if at first, dreamers looked for political asylum, religious freedom or realization of personal ideals, the more materialistic side of the Dream surfaced with the Manifest Destiny and the Westward Expansion. The West-located lands of the North American territory were gradually being invaded by those newcomers and in conjunction with this phenomenon, the Myth of the West was born. The sum of “free” lands and a strong belief in the principle of natural law, freedom and unbounded possibilities of the individual resulted in the West being the ideal destination and home for those who credited the Dream (Keller 54). This destination, inextricably linked to the Myth, marked “the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American Settlements” which affected the growing nation firmly; it provided the West pioneers with hopes to “achieve a profitable social mobility” and “to begin a life anew” (Keller 56). Thus, optimism and readiness to invest in the future, were set as the base for both Dream and Myth; the object of encouragement was wealth, which in the frontier – and every other single city– “came to be equated with social status and culture, and thus became the key to a better life” (Keller 57). All in all, investment came with personal improvement, giving rise to a pivotal feature of the Dreamer, individualism, and these two notions were incentivized by the possibility of gathering wealth and climbing the social ladder.

So, did the Dream change that much from the first settlers’ ideas of progress to the Roaring 20s’ objectives and goals? As Keller explained, some frontier characteristics were still alive during the 20s decade; optimism, materialism, and the assumption of feasible social mobility (58). However, upward mobility and the gaining of wealth were not painted over clean canvases.

During the 1920s, the American economy blossomed in terms of budgetary profits, but this augment was only palpable and profitable for those of the upper class (Maurer 9). These are the people who will perpetuate the consumerism attitude of the US citizen, as consumer goods were purchased by them at an unnerved rate. The Dream, far from the

original “Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness” was now re-shaped into “wealth, high status and –maybe– happiness”. Of course, there was space for *rags-to-riches* occasions, but behind this rise the link to criminal activity was present. Parting from the point that the Dream entails that “the greatest economic rewards rightly go to society’s most hard-working and deserving members” (Kraus et al.) an space for the rags-to-riches miracle was left to be filled by those few lucky chosen ones; nevertheless, the upsurge of the organized crime and the not-so-deserving members of society proved the efficiency with which economic rewards could be obtained and accumulated.

Despite all the positivity, the Dream gave shelter to an unquestionable dark side, a double-dealing concept: the Dream was based on the belief that the American society lacks of solid social structure –leaving the door open for upward mobility–, however; the Dream itself depended on the notion of the social hierarchy and its margins, for the sake of Dreamers being able to believe in the Dream (Reed 23). In fact, those dreamers acutely underestimated the quantum of upward mobility within the American social strata and this misinterpretation resulted in upward mobility “[being] self-serving for rich and poor people alike” (Kraus et al.): it helped the rich justify their wealth, and provided hope for the poor, the possibility of a promising economic tomorrow.

Overall, there is an undeniable truth: masses of Americans and newcomers have dreamt and are still dreaming the American Dream –being free, wealthy, having unrestricted opportunities or, purely, opportunities–. And regardless of the differences between each individual’s dream, what they all have in common is the hope of a new beginning (Keller49).

2.2. *The Great Gatsby*: What Type of Text Is It?

That *The Great Gatsby* is the symbol of the modern American novel is a well-spread consideration. The novel has had the capacity to captivate both, the academic audience and ordinary readers from its publication in 1925 until the present day. Fitzgerald’s greatest creation is the result of Modernist conventions being blended together within a literary fiction that contains tragedy, social satire, and realism. A doomed character who is unable to pursue his dreams marks the fate for a tragic ending; the different social strata are looked at through a magnifying glass, revealing their hypocritical and reproachable

behavior; and, lastly, no sweetener is added to Fitzgerald's formula, so the readers can recognize the world depicted in the novel.

Writers whose noteworthy literary creations were generated between 1920 and 1940, had stemmed into the years 1880-1910. Fitzgerald himself was born in 1896 and published *The Great Gatsby* in the year 1925. As Keller explains (41), a unique American literary blossoming took place during the years between the wars. However difficult categorizing authors to set periods and literary movements—overlapping is inevitable—resembles, Keller asserts that after the Civil War a “continuous move away from Romanticism and towards the Critical Realism” had taken place (41).

On the other hand, professor Richard Gray argued in his publication *A Brief History of American Literature* (2011) that the novel presented in 1925 is an elegiac romance. In fact, the text is Nick Carraway's look back on the past, as he recalls the hero Jay Gatsby who had a dream that never came true. The retrospective aspect of the novel connotes that by the time Nick starts narrating the story, the action that is about to be described has already been completed, and the reader is acquainted with that at the beginning of the novel. By adapting his personal life into fiction, Gray asserts that “he [Fitzgerald] sustained for his generation the great American romance of the self” (196). As a matter of fact, the romance was alive to the discrepancies and disconnection of the modern age, which the writer deviated through his “own sense of the porous, plural nature of his personality” (Gray 196).

3. Analysis of the Dream in the Novel

3.1. The Dream and Time

The American Dream in *The Great Gatsby* takes place during the 1920s, or in other words, the Roaring 20s. This era was a post-war conditioned time filled with wild energy and a feeling of high hopes. According to Cleanth Brooks, the 1920s were both, “years of disillusionment” and “frenetic excitement”, and moreover, “years of vital creativity and intellectual development” (Brooks in Ghamesi 118). During this decade, the birth of mass culture took place, together with the years of Prohibition and the Jazz Age. These three events are portrayed by Fitzgerald in his novel, being the center of attention many times.

The Great Gatsby: An Analysis of the American Dream

In relation to the birth of mass culture, it is crucial to mention the consumer culture that arose during the 20s. Americans, who now had some extra money to spend, used those savings to purchase consumer goods, such as home appliances or electric refrigerators (“The Roaring Twenties History”). But, the most important consumer good that, in fact, is central in Gatsby’s story was the automobile. Cars turned into affordable luxuries at the beginning of the decade, and by the end, they had already turned into necessities. As the article in *History.com* recollected, by the year 1929 there was one car on the road for every five Americans. This way, the economy of automobiles was born; service stations and motels evolved to meet drivers’ needs (“The Roaring Twenties History”).

Fitzgerald uses the automobile as a symbol of distinction between the riches and the working-class characters. In the novel, both Gatsby and Tom are cars owners, while, on the other side, Wilson does not own a car but a service station, that is, the worker is at the mercy of the money-owners. This way, the worker is literally left behind in the race for the Dream whereas the rich characters race themselves out to the finish line. But, we ought not forget the distinction that cars make between the two wealthy man in the novel: Gatsby’s Rolls Royce is described by Nick as “gorgeous” and a “sort of green leather conservatory”: “rich cream colour, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes and supper boxes and tool-boxes, and terraces with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrors a dozen suns” (Fitzgerald 41).

Tom’s car is just an “easy-going blue coupé” (Fitzgerald 80). These differences between the men’s cars set the individuals’ characteristics aside: while Gatsby’s car is glamorous, almost like a spectacle to witness, a sign of wealth and eccentricity, Tom’s car seems to be a sophisticated way of proving his wealth.

In fact, the automobile is pivotal in Fitzgerald’s novel. Not only as the symbol of distinction between classes, but also as the trope for materialism and a ticket to freedom. Owning a car meant having access to mobility and having the liberty to move around as one pleased; this autonomy, even if it did not break class barriers, it broke gender limitations, and women belonging to the higher classes or those who had access to a car, had the option to drive one. As we can see in the novel, both Jordan and Daisy drive, and

if we look more deeply into it, Fitzgerald uses this liberty and the car as the triggering of the chain of fatalities in the novel.

It is in chapter 7 after Nick's question "Was Daisy driving?" (Fitzgerald 92) and Gatsby's affirmative answer that readers become aware of the fact that it was under Daisy's driving that Myrtle died, as the car "ripped her open" (Fitzgerald 92). So, the car becomes this deadly two-faced monster: even if it brings freedom—for some— it also causes death. And this accident seems to be foretold by events marked by automobiles throughout the novel: first, we encounter the accident after Gatsby's party is over, right outside his mansion:

Fifty feet from the door a dozen headlights illuminated a bizarre and tumultuous scene. In the ditch beside the road, right side up, but violently shorn of one wheel, rested a new coupé which had left Gatsby's drive not two minutes before. The sharp jut of a wall accounted for the detachment of the wheel, which was now getting considerable attention from half a dozen curious chauffeurs. (Fitzgerald 35)

Secondly, in chapter 4, we find that Nick and Gatsby are overtaken by "death" as they head into the city of Manhattan, an image quite hard to ignore: "A dead man passed us in a hearse heaped with blooms, followed by two carriages with drawn blinds, and by more cheerful carriages for friends." (Fitzgerald 44).

By merging the first example together with the second one, Fitzgerald provides the readers with a destructive weapon called *the automobile*: he combines Gatsby (whose mansion is the setting for the first car accident) with the hearse that heads to the city, and offers us the final product of Gatsby's car being a death car itself, as the novel reads: "The 'death car' as the newspapers called it, didn't stop; it came out of the gathering darkness, wavered tragically for a moment, and then disappeared around the next bend" (Fitzgerald 88). All along the story, Gatsby—and us, the readers— have been warned by Fitzgerald of what the car and mobility, and excess, and a race for life would end like; in total disgrace.

Another important aspect of the 1920s used by Fitzgerald in order to construct not only the novel but also Gatsby's dream and character are parties. Gatsby appears to the

The Great Gatsby: An Analysis of the American Dream

readers as the enigmatic host of enormous and luxurious parties in his mansion. People from all over the Long Island area auto-invite themselves to these parties in search for a good time; they dance, eat, drink alcohol until their bodies give up... It was due to the freedom that cars gave Americans that they were able to go to these extravagant parties, in which Jazz music put the soundtrack for wild nights. Nevertheless, these events have two sides for the characters in the novel: for the majority, they are just a time for fun, to practice all those immoral behaviors that were condemned by the conservative Americans but for Gatsby, those parties are the way to search for Daisy's acknowledgment. Parties become the trampoline for Gatsby's reunion with Daisy, and later on the novel, they become a shelter for their time together and alone.

Fitzgerald used these parties and Gatsby's unclear money source to introduce the reality of Prohibition and bootlegging. In 1919 the 18th Amendment to the Constitution banned the manufacture and sale of "intoxicating liquors" and the 16th of January of 1920, the Volstead Act closed taverns, bars, and saloons all over the United States of America. These events marked the illegality of selling intoxicating beverages with more than 0.5% alcohol. This situation produced the appearing of two opposite positions regarding the alcohol question: the Dry Position and the Wet Position. While the Dry Position argued that Prohibition meant prosperity and economic growth, the Wet Position argued that the liquor industry was as valid as many other luxury and amusement enterprises and that Prohibition was not the cause of the growth of Americans purchasing power. (Jones 78-82)

In the novel, Prohibition goes unnoticed if we take into account the recurrent image of alcohol consumption. What Fitzgerald points at is the illegal trade of alcohol that may be behind Gatsby's success and wealth. In fact, Gatsby's relation with Wolfsheim makes him a figure close to the underground market and organized-crime; an acquaintanceship that makes Tom regard Gatsby as an impostor who has earned money in an ignoble way, even if Tom himself drinks alcohol and stands on the Wet Side of the Prohibition issue. A part of the novel that should be taken into account when talking about this topic is that in which the servant tells Gatsby that "Chicago was calling him on the wire" (Fitzgerald 32) a call that is later on received again, in chapter 9, right after Gatsby's death with Nick finding himself required to answer the phone. Chicago, as well as Philadelphia—also

mentioned through the story– were both pivotal cities concerning the illegal trade of alcohol and bootlegging to which, apparently, Gatsby was linked.

What does the American Dream have to do with this, then? Illegal alcohol trade and being part of the organized crime, was a way out of poverty for many people, as well as a way of stacking wealth for some others; people who were poor were able to earn some money while people who already possessed money had the possibility to break the law and purchase alcohol. This situation provokes a double standard approach on Tom, who being part from the highest strata of society, is able to purchase alcohol and consume it, but condemns Gatsby's money making out of the illegal trade. Moreover, it sets out a moral issue; people were willing to sacrifice their reputation in order to obtain material profit from the illegal trade, as Gatsby did. This reality was nothing more than a drawback that indicated the way to the materialist side of the Dream. Nor bootleggers neither liquor buyers felt bad when breaking the law: the first ones, could justify their acts as a means of survival; while the latter, found their actions whitewashed by their fortunes and status.

3.2. The Dream and Space

The American Dream has been distributed and “neighborhooded” by Fitzgerald in a traceable map. In fact, the novel takes place in the great barnyard of Long Island Sound. The writer, then, places three different stages or vicinities to which characteristics related to social strata will be attributed. First of all, we have East Egg, where “white palaces glitter[ed] along the water” (Fitzgerald 6); the Buchanan's side, the old riches' side of the bay. On the other side of the water, opposite to East Egg lies West Egg “the less fashionable of the two” (Fitzgerald 5). On this side of the bay Nick's humble cottage stands next to Gatsby's colossal mansion, which to the eyes of Nick is a “factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy” (Fitzgerald 5). Between these two Eggs stretches The Valley of Ashes, home to George B. Wilson and Myrtle Wilson:

A fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of the houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (Fitzgerald 16)

With this distribution, Fitzgerald offers a traceable path for the different approaches to the Dream and their location in space. When it comes to mobility within these territories, East and West Egg-ers move across the territory easily; people belonging to the Valley of Ashes, however, need the help or the impulse of East Egg-ers to get out of their zone. Two examples of this can be found in the novel: the first one, Myrtle's trip to the city by the hand of Tom Buchanan, and the second one, Wilson's visit to Gatsby's mansion in order to take revenge and kill him. This lack of mobility attributed to the working-class people stands for the important value of money and the restrictions created by the lack of it. On the other hand, the Buchanans', Carraway's and Gatsby's moveableness is possible due to their possession of wealth or their belonging to a higher social stratum.

In fact, West Egg is a 'go-zone' for people belonging to both high classes –the new riches and the old riches–; as they all attend Gatsby's parties even if none of them have received an invitation, as Nick explains "I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited." (Fitzgerald 27). Nevertheless, while East Egg welcomes old riches who have lost their wealth power – Nick Carraway–, it distrusts the visits from new riches.

Overall, we could conclude that outward mobility is absolute and broad for old riches from the East Egg; partial for the new-riches from the West Egg and limited for the workers from the Valley of Ashes. Allegorically, a similar situation was given amongst the social strata, which will be later on explained in the third point of the paper, which is entitled "The American Dream and Class".

Another important aspect of the relation between the American Dream and space in the novel is the contradiction that it proposes with regards to the Myth of the West. In this novel, Gatsby, Nick and the Buchanans have moved East in order to fulfill their wishes: the Buchanans are trying to live calmly, escaping from scandal; Nick Carraway is trying to earn money by selling bonds; and Gatsby, has moved East in order to pursue Happiness, or in other words, to obtain Daisy's unconditional love and affection. Elseways, the working class George B. Wilson is planning on being part of the Westward movement: for Wilson, no hope was left in the East, and "the presence of an area of seemingly

unlimited opportunities always lying west of settled communities lured [him] to begin a new life” (Keller 56).

The myth of the West only applies to the poor working-class character in the novel and to Nick Carraway, whereas rich characters decline the idea of prosperity being obtainable in the West, while their prosperous endpoint stands in the East part of the American territory. Wilson is not only looking for a prosperous life and money, but also trying to escape from the depravity that he found himself surrounded by while living in the East, in the Valley of Ashes. In fact, “he had discovered that Myrtle had some sort of life apart from him in another world, and the shock had made him sick” (Fitzgerald 79); Myrtle was trying to escalate in the social ladder by being Tom Buchanan’s lover, by being part of another “world”. On the other hand, Nick, who is presented as an able person to keep living in the East but who has been disenchanted by its “charms”, decides to return to the West, to his roots, so as to escape from the East and the East’s association with the corruption of the American Dream; as a matter of fact, Nick has been witness to the depravity of the charm of the Dream in the East, to its overemphasis on materialism and the grand importance of money for *Easterner* dreamers and socialites. Furthermore, he has seen first-hand how careless Tom and Daisy were, how 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...” (Fitzgerald 114) and so, by leaving for the West, he was trying to dodge this kind of bullets.

3.3. The Dream and Class

As we have already seen, not only is The American Dream a notion linked to space but also to class; the belief that someone could go from having nothing to being rich involved the individual’s class movement from working class to rich, that is, upward mobility. In *The Great Gatsby*, class is a central issue and, as a matter of fact, Fitzgerald portrays before our eyes the heterogeneous reality of the American society in the 1920s.

The characters in the novel can be split into three different groups, and in the end, each group has its own problems to contend with, reminding the reader of what a slippery place the world really is (Maurer 76). First, we have the rich people; placing all the rich

ones in the same group would be nothing but an error. In fact, even if it would seem as if the riches would be unified by their money, Fitzgerald proves us they were not. He presents us two divergent rich groups: people like the Buchanans and Jordan Baker, who were born into money—old riches—and people like Gatsby, who had worked their way through society to amass a fortune—the *nouveaux riches*—. Families like the Buchanans and Bakers have had money for generations and so, descendants from this clan did not need to work and they simply dedicated their spare time on their own entertainment. We see, for example, Tom's leisure time being filled with polo matches and book-readings; Jordan's spare time is spent on golf courses or parties... This leisure class, and specially Tom Buchanan, have been described as *wasteful leisure class* due to the absence of production and its destructive and anti-progressive force by Jeremy Reed (39). As Kate Maurer argues, Tom, Jordan and Daisy are the representation of the society's most elitist group as they dictate distinctions on Gatsby—needn't be reminded he is also a person of wealth—based on where his money came from and at what point in his life, rather than on how much money he has (76). Furthermore, this group perpetuates their status through material things that they own or clothing they wear: Daisy Buchanan and her relation to white clothes is the perfect representation of such idea. As Meredith Goldsmith argues, Daisy wears white dresses that match with white pearls, and also owns a little white car, which illustrates not only her *whiteness* but also her class position, as “it has always been popular with those who wish to demonstrate wealth and status through the conspicuous consumption of laundry soap or conspicuous freedom from manual labor” (456-457).

If we take into account the way that the fortunes have been inherited, Gatsby will never be like the old-riches, he has not been born into the fortune, instead, he has recently acquired the money: by this way of reasoning, he cannot be as refined as them, or sensible, and he cannot possibly have their same taste. This assertion seems to be proved by Gatsby's selection of material goods: his hydroplane, his colorful suits, his yellow car, and even his gaudy parties and mansion. The character of Jay Gatsby puts the reader under the impression of being a wealthy-overshowy man, that has no taste or style and spends his money on whatever shines the most without thinking it twice. See, for example, the “shirt scene” on chapter 5: here, Gatsby takes out a pile of shirts and begins throwing them, these shirts are described by Fitzgerald as “shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue” (59).

Besides, in contrast with the old riches, Gatsby “works” for a living and his background seizes him back to the bottom of the list; he comes from a low-class background. However negligible Gatsby may appear to the old riches’ eyes, for the rest of the people, and especially for Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby is the quintessential self-made man, or as Reed put it “an ideal American Dream figure” (2). In fact, Gatsby is the “ideal representative figure” for a country that thinks of itself as a new world if we take into account that the notion of self-making conceals the idea of a new self (Reed 2). The concept of the hard-working self-made man links material success with a set of embodyable values; and those values, represent an individualistic spirit that has been designed to replace the Old World’s emphasis on inheritance as the ultimate determinant of social status, giving importance to the individual’s ability and achievement capacities. Nevertheless, Fitzgerald’s hero is “destroyed by the materials which the American experience offers as object and criteria of passion, or, at best, he is purged of these unholy fires, chastened and reduced” (Ghamesi and Tiur 124).

A character whose status may seem blurred and that can be easily misunderstood is Nick Carraway’s. In fact, Nick embodies class anxiety in entirety: his character stands torn between the aristocratic European notion of inherited privilege and the American middle-class notion of perpetual upward mobility (Reed 35). As Nick himself lets readers know, his family “had been prominent, well-to-do people in the Middle Western city for three generations” (Fitzgerald 4) but not only this; “The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we’re descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch” (Fitzgerald 4). This way, he presents the aristocratic aspect of the Carraways, but moves on to the American middle class aspect of his character by explaining that he “decided to go East and learn the bond business”, the way he will be able to make a living and be independent from his family. Then, upward mobility—set by Nick’s introduction to the bond business—presents a problem for Nick: being half “aristocratic” this upward mobility, even if it “can validate certain class positions and forms of wealth, carries with it the threat of encroachment on pre-existing privilege” (Reed 35). Because of this dilemma, Nick’s task is to find a way to concurrently “justify and perpetuate his own wealth and status under the productive and legitimating terms of the American Dream” (Reed 35).

Thirdly, we have the characters that belong to the working class: Myrtle and George B. Wilson, the couple from the Valley of Ashes. These two characters remind the readers that no one is truly equal, and despite opportunities, there will be someone that is struggling underfoot as another person rises. As Kimberly Hearne explained, Fitzgerald understood that “below the feet of the rich lay a valley of ashes, a valley that the rich propagated and, in many cases, tyrannized for profit” (192) and in the case of these two working-class characters, both are used and dominated by the wealthy Tom Buchanan. Myrtle adopts the role of Tom’s lover and she sees their romance as a way to escape the garage that her husband and her live in, their romance as the exit from the Valley of Ashes and the stair or elevator to Tom’s status. And George, the owner of the garage, waits for Tom’s cars and orders so as to work and earn some money. In other way, labor is represented in terms of ash and decay, and Wilson’s only material hope is located in a lucky break or those from the upper classes; but, what this implies is that workers from the Valley of Ashes are denied agency as well as the notion of hard-working self-made man is undermined to them (Reed 42). Thus, the character of Wilson, having made little of himself, appears to denote that “self-making through hard work seems to be nothing more than a cruel fiction that masks a reality just as static as the inheritance model” (Reed 43).

Overall, readers are provided with the spectrum of three different classes that are intertwined and connected inevitably. The rich, that can be divided into two different groups; first of all, the old riches, completed by the Buchanans and Baker who are considered the leisure class and have been born into their fortunes. This group is linked to a classy fashion style whereas the second group, the new riches, like Gatsby, are related to a more ostentatious and showy attitude. These people have not been born into a fortune and their background pulls them back to the bottom of the social line. However, they are regarded as “self-made” men or people because of their aptitude in terms of upward-mobility and social rise. A line below this heterogenous group, we find the middle-class representative, Nick Carraway. He has a mixed status; he has a European aristocratic aura but, still, he moves East to search for a job and earn money. On the bottom of it all stands the working class: the Wilsons. They show the readers that equality is just a dream and that they have to stand underfoot so others can rise; in fact, the rich people dominate them and do with them as they please.

3.4. The Dream and Gender

The 1920s were an era of great change for women. After the war, and having experienced work outside the household, women were not willing to give up the emancipation gained during those war years and as a sign of breaking with traditional femininity, they bobbed their hair, gave up wearing corsets and so remodeled themselves. Furthermore, smoking and drinking in public spaces and at plain sight were new habits introduced by these liberated women, as well as showing a more flexible attitude and mild approach towards sex (Maurer 10). In this novel, Fitzgerald provides the readers with three different woman-images, two of them belonging to the emancipated flappers' group –Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker– and a third one, who is trying to flee the conditions of the Valley of Ashes and the working class –Myrtle Wilson–.

Firstly, I will focus on Daisy Buchanan, the “self-absorbed, shallow and elusive” woman (Roberts 74). As her surname suggests she is married to Tom Buchanan and so is part of a wealthy old-money family. Having a luxurious life in which all sorts of commodities are accessible, one could think of Daisy as the lucky white girl with the perfect life. However, her marriage is nothing but a constraint in which the agent of oppression is Tom: not only does Fitzgerald contour an intuitable relationship in which physical abuse is a reality, but also one in which Daisy suffers from psychological subjection. See for example, the scene in Chapter 1, in which Daisy shows a hurt knuckle, which was “black and blue”, and accused Tom of doing it: “I know you didn’t mean to, but you *did* do it.” (Fitzgerald 10); and a latter scene in the same chapter when Tom demands to know whether Daisy gave Nick “a little heart-to-heart talk on the veranda” (Fitzgerald 15) and afterwards discredits his wife’s words by simply advising Nick: “Don’t believe everything you hear, Nick” (Fitzgerald 15). These simple sentences and apparent harmless scenes are evidences that prove the Buchanans’ abusive relationship, Tom’s feeling of ownership towards Daisy and her subjection to him and his money. This way, Daisy is presented as a woman who tries to escape the restrictive society she grew up in but who is unable to do so, and recedes back into the only thing she knows, money. As explained by Reed, Daisy “never existed as more than a commodity to be possessed by the male characters” (60), thus her subjection to Tom and her inability to escape.

Another important aspect regarding Daisy, is represented by her baby with Tom, Pammy. This baby is important on Daisy's life not only because it is her child, but also because it is the reason why she sticks to Tom, and moreover, a living-reminder of Tom's attitudes towards their matrimony: in fact, as Daisy explains to Nick on the first chapter, "she [Pammy] was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where" and so she credits the idea of fool girls; "I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool- that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool" (Fitzgerald 13). This statement is a clear cry for help coming out from Daisy's throat, if only she was fool enough not to understand or be aware of Tom's behavior. Due to her situation, Daisy wants her baby to be a fool, unaware of the hurtful things that will surround her once she grows up.

Secondly, we have Daisy's friend, Jordan Baker. She, too, is part of the wasteful leisure class. But, unlike Daisy, she has a way of her own; she is an unmarried professional golfer who is willing to twist the rules so as to benefit herself and take advantage of the situation. As Nick describes her, "she was incurably dishonest" (Fitzgerald 38); in fact, as Nick continues Jordan's description "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" (Fitzgerald 38). So, not only does Jordan have a professional career of her own in sports –a territory for men– but she is also clever enough to play her cards in the modern society, and gambles with dishonesty when it suits her purposes. An example of this can be found on Chapter 3, when Nick recalls having heard about a row "that nearly reached the newspapers - a suggestion that she [Jordan] had moved her ball from a bad lie in the semi-final round." (Fitzgerald 38).

Nevertheless, Jordan is not as different from the Buchanans as one may think. As a matter of fact, they all move in the same circles and both sides are equally egoistical to the bone (Phelan 73). Moreover, carelessness is another trait that both parts show and share; however, unlike Tom and Daisy's carelessness towards other people's feelings and lives, Jordan's unconcern is based on her driving. At the end of Chapter 4, Nick and Jordan are together in Jordan's car, and she's is the one driving: Nick points out that she is a "rotten driver" (Fitzgerald 38) who should be more careful, to what she answers that she is careful. To Nick's reply that she is not careful, she utters "Well, other people are", and continues saying "They'll keep out of my way...It takes two to make an accident" (Fitzgerald 38-39).

These two characters, Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker are the characters that embody the behavior and style of the new American woman. In fact, the image of the Flapper was born during the Roaring Twenties in the United States, and Fitzgerald introduced this ineludible character on his novel on the shape of Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker. Young people who resulted embittered after World War I revolted against the prewar conservative behavior: women who had obtained economical and working freedom were not willing to leave their job now, the Right to Vote– confirmed by the Nineteenth Amendment– gave women a new class of emancipation (“Flappers”). Not only were they able to earn money but also, to take a political stand. In the following lines by Catherine Gourley we are able to identify Daisy and, specially, Jordan:

In the decade to come, women, in particular, would experience new freedoms...They would change how they dresses and wore their hair. These daughters would challenge their mother’s old-fashioned ideas of morality too...attitudes about dating and marriage changed, so did their behavior...The flapper cut her hair...danced all night...She appeared on the athletic field. (10-11)

But not all the female characters in *The Great Gatsby* are those belonging to the comfortable position of the leisure class. In contrast to those who embody the Dream, Fitzgerald presents Myrtle Wilson: Myrtle, unlike Daisy and Jordan, was not a careless person, partly because she could not retreat back into her money as the other two women did whenever life turned defective. She is presented, together with her husband, as the “working-class victim” (Goldsmith 461) who lives in the garage that her husband owns, in the Valley of Ashes. Myrtle is trapped in the Valley of Ashes and her only way out is through Tom. In fact, her desire to be part of the upward-mobility phenomenon leads her to a love affair with Tom Buchanan, with whom she seems pleased to escape from the Valley.

It is in this relationship that Myrtle translates into a mere object of desire, an object for Tom to enjoy and preserve—for as long as he wants—by simply bribing her with material goods. A good example of this can be found in Chapter 2 when Tom buys a dog for her, as well as he keeps an apartment in the city for their getaways. By doing this, he ensures a link of ownership towards Myrtle, who lives at his mercy now. In addition to

the objectification of Myrtle, she also suffers from physical abuse from Tom who “making a short deft movement, broke her nose with his open hand” (Fitzgerald 25). This way, her course towards the Dream is confined between the walls of abuse and domination. So, not only is she a working-class victim, but also another of Tom’s carelessness and authority’s sufferer. If her suffering has its base on real love for Tom or not is another question; if we take into account the way in which Myrtle stares at Jordan thinking she is Daisy, or the way she runs towards Gatsby’s car –thinking that is Tom who is driving it– we could decide that there is a feeling of love that stems from Myrtle towards Mr. Buchanan.

4. Conclusion

The American Dream’s conception has evolved over time and different senses have been attributed to the concept. From the very promise of political or religious freedom to the very promise of material good and land-owning possibility. As it has been explained earlier in the paper, even if the Dream existed beforehand it was thanks to James Truslow that we can name the phenomenon, as he coined the term “American Dream” in his work *The Epic of America* in 1931. Being the Dream a notion that adapts to the needs of different generations of individual who arrive to the North American territory, it is predictable that the Dream itself will not work alike for every dreamer or person involved in it.

This paper has analyzed the different challenges that the Dream presents for the characters with regards to their position in time, space, class and gender in Fitzgerald’s best-seller novel. In terms of time, we have been able to identify the two-faced reality of the Dream and the characters: the rising of the automobile has provided both, autonomy and disgrace for them; Parties gave place for Jazz music and alcohol consumption, which seems positive enough if it was not for the establishment of the 18th Amendment, which made it illegal to sell or consume alcohol. We have been witnesses to the breaking of the Prohibition law and to the activity of bootlegging, and, moreover, we have identified the double morality that alcohol consumption carried regarding the high-class members. In fact, nor bootleggers neither liquor buyer and consumers felt bad for their actions, as they justified them by tagging their behavior as mere survival or whitewashed it by means of their money.

As for space, Fitzgerald has proven that the American Dream is a traceable idea that has been distributed in neighborhoods through Long Island. Not only can we differentiate three divergent social strata in terms of location, but also measure the mobility to which these members of the three groups have access to. Shortly, East Egg stands for the old riches while West Egg is home to the nouveau riches or aristocratic-but-not-so-rich people. Between these two, stands the home of the working class, the Valley of Ashes. As for mobility, while the first group enjoys total freedom, the second one is not that welcome in East Egg, and the third one needs the help of the old-riches so as to exit the Valley of Ashes. So, outward mobility is absolute for the old-riches, partial for the new-riches and limited for the working-class people. Furthermore, due to Fitzgerald's construction of the characters, we have been able to foresee the contradiction of the Myth of the West. While Gatsby, the Buchanans and Nick (in the beginning) look for a prosperous life in the East, George B. Wilson and later on Nick, want to retreat to the West in search for a better life far from the corruption of the Dream that they have been onlookers of.

The Dream is inevitably linked to social class, and being this so, *The Great Gatsby* groups the characters in three different levels: the wealthy people (old-riches and new-riches), the middle-class representative and the workers of the bottom of the line. These distinctions have established a system of upward mobility in which the old riches stand at the top of the pyramid; the nouveau-riches and self-made men stand below the old riches, since they have amassed a fortune but have not inherited their status through their families; thirdly, the middle-class representative would take a place, with the anxiety of having an inherited aristocratic privilege but little money; and, finally at the bottom of it all, the working-class people, the real sustainers of the system. What the book proves is that real equality is not possible for all and that it is not money that gives you height on the social pyramid, but the family background and inheritance.

On the subject of gender, a distinction is made between the type of women that take part in the story. We have the representations of the Flappers, Daisy and Jordan, who have lived a comfortable life; and, Myrtle Wilson, the dreamer who wishes to escape the Valley of Ashes. The Flappers, and more concretely Daisy, even if she is considered the representation of the new American woman, she bears with her the weight of a still-sexist and women-objectifying society. In fact, she lives an abusive relationship with her

The Great Gatsby: An Analysis of the American Dream

husband, but cannot escape since money has been a way of retreat for her and does not know otherwise. In the case of Myrtle, she too, has to suffer from this objectification and abusive relationship with Tom in order to live the life she wants and so as to have the opportunity to escape the Valley of Ashes. So, Fitzgerald's writing proves that even if women had gained new freedoms and capacities they were still chained to men's decisions and attitudes.

It is by all the aforementioned that Fitzgerald provides the readers with the reality of the shiny and promising Dream: a critique on society's stance towards the over-admired notion of opportunities and possibilities, and a call of attention towards the unrealistic longing for a rags-to-riches transformation.

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