

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

Christine Czechová

Bachelor's thesis
2018



Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Humanities

Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně
Fakulta humanitních studií
Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur
akademický rok: 2017/2018

ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

(PROJEKTU, UMĚLECKÉHO DÍLA, UMĚLECKÉHO VÝKONU)

Jméno a příjmení: **Christine Czechová**
Osobní číslo: **H15581**
Studijní program: **B7310 Filologie**
Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk pro manažerskou praxi**
Forma studia: **prezenční**

Téma práce: **Kniha *Velký Gatsby* jako obraz americké společnosti bouřlivých 20. let**

Zásady pro vypracování:

Shromáždění materiálů k tématu
Studium odborné literatury a materiálů
Formulace cílů práce
Analýza společnosti bouřlivých 20. let podle knihy *Velký Gatsby*
Shrnutí výsledků a formulace závěrů

Rozsah bakalářské práce:

Rozsah příloh:

Forma zpracování bakalářské práce: **tištěná/elektronická**

Seznam odborné literatury:

Cullen, Jim. The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Hühn, Peter, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, eds. Handbook of Narratology. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

Johnson, Paul. Dějiny amerického národa. Translated by Věra and Jan Lamperovi. Voznice: Leda, 2014.

Nash, Gary B. The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society. Concise 7th ed. Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011.

Zinn, Howard. A People's History of the United States. New York: HarperCollins, 2015.

Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

Gregory Jason Bell, B.A., M.B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Ústav moderních jazyků a literatur

Datum zadání bakalářské práce:

10. listopadu 2017

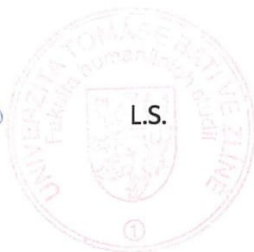
Termín odevzdání bakalářské práce:

4. května 2018

Ve Zlíně dne 8. ledna 2018



doc. Ing. Anežka Lengálová, Ph.D.
děkanka



PhDr. Katarína Nemčoková, Ph.D.
ředitelka ústavu

PROHLÁŠENÍ AUTORA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

Beru na vědomí, že

- odevzdáním bakalářské práce souhlasím se zveřejněním své práce podle zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, bez ohledu na výsledek obhajoby ¹⁾;
- beru na vědomí, že bakalářská práce bude uložena v elektronické podobě v univerzitním informačním systému dostupná k nahlédnutí;
- na moji bakalářskou práci se plně vztahuje zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, zejm. § 35 odst. 3 ²⁾;
- podle § 60 ³⁾ odst. 1 autorského zákona má UTB ve Zlíně právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití školního díla v rozsahu § 12 odst. 4 autorského zákona;
- podle § 60 ³⁾ odst. 2 a 3 mohu užít své dílo – bakalářskou práci - nebo poskytnout licenci k jejímu využití jen s předchozím písemným souhlasem Univerzity Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně, která je oprávněna v takovém případě ode mne požadovat přiměřený příspěvek na úhradu nákladů, které byly Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně na vytvoření díla vynaloženy (až do jejich skutečné výše);
- pokud bylo k vypracování bakalářské práce využito softwaru poskytnutého Univerzitou Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně nebo jinými subjekty pouze ke studijním a výzkumným účelům (tj. k nekomerčnímu využití), nelze výsledky bakalářské práce využít ke komerčním účelům.

Prohlašuji, že

- elektronická a tištěná verze bakalářské práce jsou totožné;
- na bakalářské práci jsem pracoval samostatně a použitou literaturu jsem citoval. V případě publikace výsledků budu uveden jako spoluautor.

Ve Zlíně 4.5.2018

..... 

1) zákon č. 111/1998 Sb. o vysokých školách a o změně a doplnění dalších zákonů (zákon o vysokých školách), ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 47b Zveřejňování závěrečných prací;

(1) Vysoká škola nevydělečně zveřejňuje disertační, diplomové, bakalářské a rigorózní práce, u kterých proběhla obhajoba, včetně posudků oponentů a výsledku obhajoby prostřednictvím databáze kvalifikačních prací, kterou spravuje. Způsob zveřejnění stanoví vnitřní předpis vysoké školy.

(2) Disertační, diplomové, bakalářské a rigorózní práce odevzdané uchazečem k obhajobě musí být též nejméně pět pracovních dnů před konáním obhajoby zveřejněny k nahlížení veřejnosti v místě určeném vnitřním předpisem vysoké školy nebo není-li tak určeno, v místě pracoviště vysoké školy, kde se má konat obhajoba práce. Každý si může ze zveřejněné práce pořizovat na své náklady výpisy, opisy nebo rozmnoženiny.

(3) Platí, že odevzdáním práce autor souhlasí se zveřejněním své práce podle tohoto zákona, bez ohledu na výsledek obhajoby.

2) zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 35 odst. 3:

(3) Do práva autorského také nezasahuje škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení, užije-li nikoli za účelem přímého nebo nepřímého hospodářského nebo obchodního prospěchu k výuce nebo k vlastní potřebě dílo vytvořené žákem nebo studentem ke splnění školních nebo studijních povinností vyplývajících z jeho právního vztahu ke škole nebo školskému či vzdělávacího zařízení (školní dílo).

3) zákon č. 121/2000 Sb. o právu autorském, o právech souvisejících s právem autorským a o změně některých zákonů (autorský zákon) ve znění pozdějších právních předpisů, § 60 Školní dílo:

(1) Škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení mají za obvyklých podmínek právo na uzavření licenční smlouvy o užití školního díla (§ 35 odst.

3). Odpirá-li autor takového díla udělit svolení bez vážného důvodu, mohou se tyto osoby domáhat nahrazení chybějícího projevu jeho vůle u soudu. Ustanovení § 35 odst. 3 zůstává nedotčeno.

(2) Není-li sjednáno jinak, může autor školního díla své dílo užít či poskytnout jinému licenci, není-li to v rozporu s oprávněnými zájmy školy nebo školského či vzdělávacího zařízení.

(3) Škola nebo školské či vzdělávací zařízení jsou oprávněny požadovat, aby jim autor školního díla z výdělku jím dosaženého v souvislosti s užitím díla či poskytnutím licence podle odstavce 2 přiměřeně přispěl na úhradu nákladů, které na vytvoření díla vynaložily, a to podle okolností až do jejich skutečné výše; přitom se přihlédne k výši výdělku dosaženého školou nebo školským či vzdělávacím zařízením z užití školního díla podle odstavce 1.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyses the portrayal of the historical and social phenomena in the fictional narrative of *The Great Gatsby*. In the first part, the thesis concentrates on a description of the historical background of the post-war era and its portrayal in the novel. Furthermore, this thesis deals with four major themes connected to the cultural and economic development of the era and their impact on the American society. The image of the era is hauntingly real, and the vividness of it adds value to the portrayal of a social history. The thesis comes to the conclusion that Fitzgerald illustrates the social stereotypes of his era, and through his own experience and imagination he creates a limited and yet rich portrayal of the Roaring Twenties.

Keywords: *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, United States history, Roaring Twenties, WWI, symbolism, society, dreams

ABSTRAKT

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje podobu historických a společenských jevů ve vyprávění knihy *Velký Gatsby*. V první části se práce zaměřuje na dobový kontext příběhu, poválečné období, a jeho vyobrazení v rámci díla. Dále analyzuje čtyři hlavní témata, související s kulturním a ekonomickým rozvojem v daném období a jejich dopad na tehdejší americkou společnost. Vyobrazení této doby je pronikavě skutečné a jeho přesnost udává hodnotu společenské historii. Práce dochází k závěru, že Fitzgerald znázorňuje společenské stereotypy své doby a skrze své vlastní prožitky a bohatou představivost vytváří neúplný a přesto bohatý obraz americké společnosti bouřlivých dvacátých let.

Klíčová slova: *Velký Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald, historie Spojených států amerických, Bouřlivá dvacátá léta, První světová válka, symbolismus, sny

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Foremost, I would like to express my special appreciation and gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Gregory Jason Bell, for his continuous guidance and immense knowledge. Your brilliant suggestions and feedback have been absolutely invaluable. Besides my supervisor, I would like to thank my family, for all the sacrifices that they have made on my behalf.

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.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
1 FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD.....	10
1.1 <i>THE GREAT GATSBY</i>	13
1.1.1 Plot summary	14
2 THE GREAT GATSBY AND THE GREAT WAR	19
2.1 THE GREAT WAR IN EUROPE	20
2.2 AMERICAN REACTION	20
2.3 PUBLIC OPINION.....	22
2.4 MILITARY EXPERIENCE	23
2.5 AMERICAN WAR MACHINE	24
2.6 LEGACY OF THE GREAT WAR	24
2.7 <i>THE GREAT GATSBY</i> AND MILITARY EXPERIENCE.....	25
2.7.1 Nick Carraway	26
2.7.2 Jay Gatsby	26
3 THE EIGHTEENTH AMENDMENT.....	28
3.1 THE BOOTLEGGER'S PARADISE IN THE WORLD OF <i>THE GREAT GATSBY</i>	28
4 THE NEW PROSPERING ECONOMY.....	31
4.1 THE POWER OF MONEY	31
4.2 CONSUMERISM AND MATERIALISM	34
4.3 THE AUTOMOBILE AND AMERICAN LIFE	35
5 THE NEW CULTURE AND THE CONFLICT WITHIN.....	38
5.1 RACIAL PREJUDICE	38
5.1.1 Racial boundaries in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	38
5.2 THE NEW WOMAN	39
5.2.1 Girls, women and <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	41
CONCLUSION	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

INTRODUCTION

“It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire.”

– F. Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, the chronicler of the Jazz Age, portrays his American experience in the cautionary tale of the American dream. Through the romantic lens of *The Great Gatsby*, the cultural and social history is given shape and colour by the immensely rich imagination of a man, who binds romantic wonder with moral critique. Moreover, the life of Fitzgerald reveals the significant parallelism of his reality and fiction. The era of the Roaring Twenties emerged from the disillusionment of the Great War, and it came to an end with the Great Depression. Beneath the glittering surface of the Roaring Twenties, however, was the corruption of the American society. The prospering economy drew a pattern of national expansion, and the market was ruled by consumerism and mass production. Moreover, the shallowness of the modern pursuit dehumanised people and brought an era of rising intolerance. The United States roared and yet there was injustice, inequality and imbalance within its borders. The era that flourished in the time of peace did not fulfil its promise of equality and the culture was ruled by intensified political and social conflict. This bachelor thesis aims to analyse the portrayal of the contemporary historical and social phenomena in the fictional narrative of *The Great Gatsby*. Firstly, the phenomenon of the divided legacy of the Great War and its influence on the American society, as well as the impact of military experience on the character development is analysed. Secondly, the historical background of the Eighteenth Amendment and its portrayal is mentioned. Furthermore, the significant connections to the corruption of the national prosperity and the value of money are analysed as well. The last analysis approaches the topic of cultural conflict and social prejudice. This thesis proves that *The Great Gatsby* has an ingrained moral sense to it, which evaluates the social ideals of its era. Moreover, the novel reflects the era with limited accuracy and the influence of dramatization, illusion and imaginative techniques is of great significance in regard to the portrayal analysis.

1 FRANCIS SCOTT FITZGERALD

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born into an upper middle class family on September 24, 1896, in St. Paul, Minnesota. His mother, Mollie McQuillan, was a daughter of a wealthy Irish immigrant, while his father, Edward Fitzgerald, was a descendent from prominent colonial legislators and a distant relative of Francis Scott Key, the author of the lyrics that would become the U.S. national anthem.¹ They named their son in his honour. Despite his impressive roots, Edward was an ineffectual man whose ambitions were limited to sales. Mollie took her marriage vows to heart and stuck by her husband through good times and bad. Such bad times outweighed the good, including the death of two previous children and Edward's business failures. F. Scott Fitzgerald's childhood was defined by mobility, as Edward's sales jobs prompted repeated moves around upstate New York.² This developed Scott's awareness, at an early age, of the solidity of wealth and of the fragility of everyday life. He was a precocious and imaginative child with few friends, who was pampered by his mother.³ When Scott was twelve, his father lost his job. It was at this moment that Scott's lifelong fear of living in poverty took root.⁴ In spite of his economic insufficiencies and failings, Edward remained a gentleman, and his words, actions and beliefs became the baseline of many of his son's stories. Indeed, many of Scott's own experiences are hidden within the lines of his fictional narratives. Later in life, Scott developed a habit of everlasting social self-consciousness, which was further endorsed by his already established insecurities.⁵

While at St. Paul, he attended a local academy, and he published his first ever work; "The Mystery of the Raymond Mortgage" printed in *Now and Then* in 1909. As he grew, his education suffered due to his repetitious academic failures.⁶ He also studied at Newman and Princeton, where he witnessed the means of social and academic distinction. In his younger

¹ Arthur Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (London: Endeavour Press Ltd., 2015), chap. 1, Kindle. Chapters are listed, the Kindle version does not include page numbering.

² Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 4, Kindle.

³ Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁴ Miller, *New World Coming*, 4, Kindle.

⁵ Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise*, chap. 1, Kindle.

⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 1, Kindle.

years, he often found himself fascinated with other people, whether it was their looks, adventurousness, success or even their flaws, and his mind would be surrounded by their lives, adding elements of imagination and creating a special fiction. Miss Ginevra King, a beautiful golden girl with a daring nature, was one of those people. She was brought up by the amenity of wealth, and her charm and elusiveness attracted Fitzgerald as none other thus far. She represented the substance of innocence, beauty and easiness of wealth and for a lifetime, Fitzgerald's imagination would not be free from the notion she embodied.⁷

When The United States of America joined the Great War, Fitzgerald obtained a post as a second lieutenant and developed yet another dream of social quality as a romantic war hero. Determined that he would lose his life in the effort, he worked hard on his novel *The Romantic Egotist*.⁸ However, instead of losing his life, he found love in the Country Club of Montgomery. Her name was Zelda Sayre. She was a daughter of the respectable Alabama Supreme Court judge and a beautiful Southern princess. She was also a lively, courageous being, whose life was a chain of garden parties, foolishness and pampering.⁹ Fitzgerald was discharged from the army on February 14, 1919, and due to his lack of prospects, Zelda found herself reluctant to the commitment.¹⁰ However, once he rewrote *The Romantic Egoist*, and published it as *This Side of Paradise*, he won back his elusive princess, and he set forth on a journey to the American dream. People who had read *This Side of Paradise* either found the story to be fabulous, miserable or something in between, and reviews included both praise and blame. But to some people it has also been a story of revelation. Fathers and mothers anxiously discussed whether their own children were secretly living as the book heroes and heroines lived, or whether the story was an exaggerated portrayal of a depraved fragment of society.¹¹ Fitzgerald described the extravagance of his generation as if it was something new and he did so in daring details. His portrayal of the era is hauntingly real, and the vividness of it adds value to his ability to remember and illustrate social history.

⁷ Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise*, chap. 2, Kindle.

⁸ Miller, *New World Coming*, 5, Kindle.

⁹ Marion Meade, *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin: Writers Running Wild in the Twenties* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2009), chap. 1, Kindle. Chapters are listed, the Kindle version does not include page numbering.

¹⁰ Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise*, chap. 4, Kindle.

¹¹ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (New York: Open Road Media, 2015), 78-79, Kindle.

His characters are varied in terms of temperament, desires and dreams, but most of them carry resemblance to the author and his world.¹²

Francis Scott Fitzgerald married Zelda Sayre on April 3, 1920. The golden bloom was upon them and the whirl of parties took over their occupation. They became the embodiment of American flaming youth, and in the public eye, he was her hero as she was his heroin, constantly living lives of romance, jealousy and thrill. However, they both cared little for consequences and their irrational spending often caused a budget crisis. Moreover, Fitzgerald lived with a burden of realisation, for he knew that once a dream is fulfilled, it is also lost.¹³ In years to follow, they would chase their dreams like children, and they would subdue to their own demons of alcohol, anxiety and recklessness. They were young and yet their lives were already tiresome. Zelda embodied the flapper in all her unconventionality and wildness, and her personal traits and thoughts were projected into the fiction. Moreover, their marriage gave an essence to the marriage of Tom and Daisy Buchanan. Through his romantic idealism, Fitzgerald chose to see the romance rather than the decay of their relationship.¹⁴

Francis Scott Fitzgerald not only lived in the era of the Jazz Age, he also shaped it, described it and embraced it. While he celebrated the romance and tragedy of his own American dream, a “fresh picture of life in America began to form”¹⁵ before his eyes. And as he later wrote, “the uncertainties of 1919 were over – there seemed little doubt about what was going to happen – America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history and there was going to be plenty to tell about it.”¹⁶

The term “Lost Generation,” as popularised by the American writer Gertrude Stein, refers to the youth of the American writing society. They emerged from World War I, and fell into the disillusionment and disenchantment of the 1920s. They left the United States

¹² Mizener, *The Far Side of Paradise*, chap. 5, Kindle.

¹³ *Ibid.*, chap. 6, Kindle.

¹⁴ Meade, *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin*, chap. 5, Kindle.

¹⁵ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2009), "Early Success", Kindle. Chapters are listed, the Kindle version does not include page numbering.

¹⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Early Success", Kindle.

and sought a personal fulfilment in European cities. To Fitzgerald, it was Paris, a place of romantic wonder.¹⁷

1.1 *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby was published on April 10, 1925, and it became a cautionary tale of the American dream. In his novel, Fitzgerald portrays and unfolds the story of American experience. It is a hauntingly personal illustration of the American nation, and it is a tale of hidden polarities, for where there are dreams, there are also nightmares.¹⁸ Furthermore, its capacity for romantic wonder and moral critique and its charming characters and their rotten cores, creates an unforgettable portrayal of the golden era. But under the surface of gold and glamour, there are two symbolic dreams that define American society, and that carry their own seeds of corruption. The pursuit of eternal youth and glory, and the balance of romance and thrill is one of them. The second was the money itself. Both dreams are intimately related, for the beauty is an illusion fuelled by consumerism, shallow pursuits and social inequality, while love can be bought or violently manipulated. However, these dreams are destined to fail inevitably. Jay Gatsby has greatness and gorgeousness credited to him, but he also has the gift, or curse, of imagination and endless wonder. Nevertheless, his unrealisable dream eventually takes more than it gives, and Gatsby is preyed upon by the American upper class.¹⁹

The story is told from the perspective of a personalized narrator; Nick Carraway. Nick claims that “reserving judgment is a matter of infinite hope.”²⁰ However, his attitude towards the told is not freed from it. Therefore, his representation of events and characters is not entirely neutral, nor it is detached. His manner of telling the story is sophisticated and his stylistic choices are of an ornate style, by which he creates a multifarious narrated world, full of symbolism and complexity. Nick narrates his story in retrospective, and all the

¹⁷ Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People* (New York, McGraw–Hill, 2014), 542.

¹⁸ John F. Callahan, "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream: The "Pursuit of Happiness" in *Gatsby*, *Tender Is the Night*, and *The Last Tycoon*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 42, no. 3 (1996): 374-380, accessed April 2, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/441769>.

¹⁹ Edwin S. Fussell, "Fitzgerald's Brave New World." *ELH* 19, no. 4 (1952): 291-295, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2871901>.

²⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2016), 7.

knowledge he shares originates in his memory. Moreover, he has the ability to withhold information completely or share it with delay. Consequently, his credibility as a chronicle of his narrated world is a matter of question.²¹ Nick as a narrator is both on the inside and outside of his world, where he bears witness to the chain of inevitable events. He is an eyewitness as much as he is a participant and his character is both enchanted and repelled by the nature of reality. In his character, there is the urge to escape the vastness and corruption of his world, and yet he stays to absorb the sense of wonder.²²

1.1.1 Plot summary

Nick Carraway, the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*, tells a tale of American society. In search of a new purpose, Nick leaves his native Middle West and comes East, where he takes on a particular interest in the bond business. He rents a house twenty miles east from New York in the area of West Egg, Long Island. Overlooking the courtesy bay there lays the more fashionable East Egg, where Tom and Daisy Buchanan await his presence. Daisy is his second cousin once removed, and Tom is a man whom he had known from his senior college society. Inside their mansion, where all the privileges of their lives are materialised, he dines with the Buchanans and with a girl he had never met before – Jordan Baker. Later that evening a phone rings and as Tom rushes to answer, Nick learns a secret that everybody but he knows – Tom has a mistress in New York. As Nick drives away and leaves behind the fragments of what just happened, he feels both greatly confused and little disgusted by the vast carelessness of their lives. When he arrives home, he notices a silhouette of a man. It is Gatsby, who stands there for a brief moment, stretches out his arms towards the darkness of the night and tries to grasp a green light at the opposite side of the bay.

Born James Gatz, he changed his name to Jay Gatsby at the age of seventeen. He was a son to unsuccessful farmers. Gatsby was driven by imagination, and by the time he met Dan Cody at the Lake Superior, he invented an idea of a young gentleman that would save him from his penurious past. In their arrangement, Gatsby took on various duties, and Cody kept him around for as long as five years. However, as strong as their bond might have been,

²¹ Peter Hühn, et al., *Handbook of Narratology* (Hamburg: Hamburg University), "Narrator", accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/narrator>. Refers to the updated online version of the book.

²² Benjamin Schreier, "Desire's Second Act: "Race" and "The Great Gatsby's": Cynical Americanism," *Twentieth Century Literature* 53, no. 2 (2007): 164, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/20479804>.

when Cody passed away all that remained was his legacy. By the time this was all behind him, he had grown into a man that was a vague contour of Jay Gatsby. From that moment on, he remained faithful to the once invented conception of himself, and he fabricated his whole history to support it.

One day, Tom invites Nick to accompany him on a train to New York. The railroad runs through a vast and desolated area called the valley of ashes, where the train windows project a scenery of rising smoke, tired ash-grey men and above it all there is the persistent stare of Dr T. J. Eckleburg. They meet Myrtle, who is the wife of George B. Wilson, and a mistress to Tom. Later that day, they move hauntingly through the streets of the city, and after a while, they journey to their secret apartment, where the afternoon is to be spent in the company friends and whiskey. In those drunken moments, Nick is both enchanted and repelled by the variety of life and while the groups are formed and dissolved in that tiny living room, their actions are about to speak for themselves. Drunkenness turns to violence, and as Tom stands over Myrtle, who at the same moment holds a towel to her bleeding nose, the argument over his beloved wife that started the whole rage is soon forgotten.

As the tones of music wander into the summer nights, the rich and the young crawl from the city to enjoy the luxury and thrill of music, and to find their place in the corrupted society. To Nick, Gatsby is still a subject of mystery. He tries to find the host at one of the parties, but it is as if Gatsby was a ghost who only observes the crowd and does not become a part of it. Later that night, Nick runs into Jordan Baker. Together, they drift through the attending groups and listen to the wild speculations that are all inspired by the mysterious Gatsby. Eventually, Nick finds out that his new acquaintance, a young roughneck who claims to have met him during the war, is the gracious host himself. Their conversation is brief as Gatsby leaves to answer a phone call. However, before the night is over Jordan speaks to Gatsby in private.

Nick finds Jordan again in midsummer, and despite her dishonesty, he succumbs to his 'tender' curiosity and spends days in her company. He also gradually becomes friends with Gatsby and learns more about him than the whispering crowd ever could. Nevertheless, during the summer Gatsby is never quite still around Nick, and his lies are a set of hurried and swallowed phrases. One day, Nick and Gatsby journey together to the city, where they meet Meyer Wolfsheim. Gatsby introduces him as a friend, but in reality, he is his associate in the bootlegging business. Wolfsheim is quite fond of Gatsby, but his peculiar personality leaves a divided impression on Nick. Later that day, Nick meets Jordan for a tea, and she tells him a story that was kept a secret thus far. Gatsby not only knew Daisy Buchanan, but

he also loved her. They met in Louisville when Daisy was just eighteen, and Gatsby was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. As the year of 1917 came to an end, wild rumours spread about young Daisy Fay and the soldier who had left for overseas. By the next autumn, Daisy was joyful again and she was engaged to a wealthy man named Tom Buchanan. The day before her wedding, she received a letter from Gatsby that brought tears to her eyes. However, the next day she walked up the aisle with a pearl necklace around her neck. Each of those pearls on the once broken string reflected the true nature of Daisy Fay, the golden princess. It is no coincidence that Gatsby lives just across the bay from Daisy. All those summer nights he had hoped that Daisy would wander into his mansion and he would never have lost her again. Now, he desires to meet with her and Nick is just the man who could arrange it. Therefore, Jordan presents Nick with Gatsby's modest demand to invite Daisy over to his house.

When a date is agreed upon and Daisy arrives at Nick house, every detail is defined by perfection and reflects the nature of the most romanticised dream. However, their reunion is nervous and embarrassing at first as they both hesitate to speak. Nick leaves the house for a moment so that the former lovers could find their way back to one another. When he returns, the vestige of embarrassment is gone and instead, there is a radiating glow around two people, who just found what they lost all those years ago. Gatsby invites Daisy and Nick to his home, and as the afternoon unfolds, Daisy is taken away by his belongings, whereas he is consumed with wonder and delight of her presence. Later, as the lovers stand next to each other, Gatsby reaches to the mist for the green light once more just to show her, how close to him she has been the whole time. He had dreamed of the image of her for so long, but because of his ghostly heart and passionate imagination, the illusion of her had gone beyond the quality of present happiness.

In the late summer, The Buchanans attend one of the famous parties everyone has been talking about. Tom spends the night in the company of other women, while Daisy dances with Gatsby and eventually sneaks into the midnight gardens with him. Later that night, Nick shares a few words with Gatsby and within those words, there is the ultimate desire to recapture what was once lost. Gatsby believes in the pursuit of illusion and his heart is trapped by the aspiration of infinite romance. Consequently, he believes that the key to his dreams can only be recovered from the past, where he and Daisy left the fragments of their love.

As the summer comes to an end, Nick and Gatsby join the Buchanans for lunch in their mansion. While, there Daisy behaves as if her affair was something of a momentary thrill that avoids any harsh consequences. However, her behaviour does not go unnoticed, and

Tom finds it hard to handle his temper. They all journey to the city, but they do so by two automobiles. Tom stops with Gatsby's car at Wilson's gas station, where he learns that Wilson knows of Myrtle's affair. Their discoveries are nearly parallel, but Wilson does not know who the man is. Tom finds himself in distress. He lost control over both his wife and his mistress in a matter of one day. He instinctively steps on the accelerator so that his wife would not distance herself any further. They all arrive at the Plaza hotel, where the previously obtained whiskey adds means to the upcoming tragedy. Tension increases in the air and as Tom does not hold back on disrespectful comments and obtrusive questions, the whole party experience social discomfort. Consequently, Gatsby confronts Tom by revealing the true nature of his relationship with Daisy. Furthermore, he asks too much of Daisy when he wants her to admit that she never loved her husband. When she hesitantly does so, her voice breaks into helpless sobs and the dishonesty of her words shatter Gatsby's dreams. However, he prevails in defence of his illusion and declares that he is the one to take care of her and that she is going to leave Tom. Nevertheless, despite the vastness of their marriage, Daisy and Tom believe in the institution of the family. Moreover, Tom knows Daisy for who she is, and he understands the value of their privileged lives. To prove his point, he reveals the corruption of Gatsby's businesses whereupon he accuses him of being a bootlegger.

Later that day, in the valley of ashes, Myrtle Wilson rushes out into the road where she is hit by a passing vehicle. She dies instantly and as her blood spreads through the dust, the mysterious 'death car' disappears. When Tom, Nick and Jordan approach the garage on their journey to East Egg, they slow down just to see the crowds gathered inside, and to hear the hollow and wailing cry that echoes in the distance. As Tom wanders into the garage, a scene opens before his eyes – the body of his mistress lays covered in blankets, and her husband cries horribly in the corner. The car that hit her is the subject of an investigation. However, its yellow colour suggests that it might have been Gatsby's car. When they arrive at East Egg, Nick is sickened by the corrupted morality and carelessness of people who he recognises now less than ever. As he walks to wait for a taxi by the gate, he meets Gatsby. Nick sees through his lies once again, and he learns that Daisy was the one to have driven the car, but Gatsby will be the one to take all the blame. When Gatsby arrives home, they sit in the darkness of his mansion, where Nick learns more about the strange story of his youth. But to Gatsby, the story of how he loved and lost Daisy has a greater significance than anything he ever lived through. Around noon, Nick talks to Jordan over the phone but their conversation, to Nick's indifference ends sharply.

As the story unfolds, Nick describes the tragedy of death and deception. Wilson dies believing that the man who stole the heart of his wife was also the man that killed her. This idea is not entirely his own, as later in the story, Nick reveals that the impulse came from Tom. In his grief, he takes two lives – Gatsby's and his own. When Gatsby dies, Nick finds himself utterly alone. All those people that enjoyed his solidarity restrained themselves from any personal interest in his passing. The one person that Gatsby held dear, and the reason he became the man he was, vanished into thin air. When he lived, his house was a shining beacon of the era and Gatsby himself represented life in all its corrupted glory. But once he was gone, so was the light and he had been forgotten.

Nick leaves the West Egg and returns home to find solace. But before he does so, he wanders down to the beach, and for the last time, he projects an image of Gatsby. It is here, where Gatsby once stood and outstretched his arms towards the green light that Nick ends his narration. Gatsby believed that the past could be undone and repeated, but his obsession with the illusions of his dreams became his downfall.

2 *THE GREAT GATSBY AND THE GREAT WAR*

Undoubtedly, the Jazz Age was greatly influenced by the events of World War I, as it was shaped by both its social and economic aftermaths. The journey of Americans towards modernisation started long before the war. However, the Victorian presumptions that valued order, hierarchy and above all morality were blown to pieces in the post-war era.²³ The Great War contributed extensively to the economic boom that brought an era of prosperity and consumerism. Moreover, the liberation of women accelerated, and a new set of cultural values took root. Big cities became centres of the mass culture, and the pursuit of consumer products replaced the post-war depression with recklessness. The middle and upper classes ignored or judged the post-war ugliness of immigration and poverty, and the tide of intolerance was on the rise.²⁴

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the author of *The Great Gatsby*, brought his military experiences into his writings. The events of the Great War greatly influenced the lives of his fictional creations. Moreover, the society of *The Great Gatsby* strongly resembled the post-war society of the United States. The core of the cultural trends and social connections was defined by the escape from disillusionment and the terrors of war and therefore by the search for a new extreme. Furthermore, the society was controlled by trends of excessive materialism and the infinite chase of shallow pursuits. Prominent well-to-do Americans were a cause of many misfortunes that destroyed the lives of the middle and lower classes. Whether it was Tom who sought thrill and entertainment in the pursuit of forbidden fruit, or Daisy, who represented the pure unworthiness and tragedy of the American dream, they both defined the illusions of the Jazz Age. As Fitzgerald wrote in the *Echoes of the Jazz Age*, “it was borrowed time anyhow – the whole upper tenth of a nation living with the insouciance of grand ducs and the casualness of chorus girls.”²⁵ This chapter deals with the historical background of WWI and the effects of its legacy on the post-war society of the United States. Moreover, the nature of the character development due to their military experience and the influence of WWI on the storyline of *The Great Gatsby* will be analysed.

²³ Miller, *New World Coming*, 16, Kindle.

²⁴ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 4-14, Kindle.

²⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Echoes of the Jazz Age", Kindle.

2.1 The Great War in Europe

World War I was the second largest armed conflict in history. The advanced European nations operated based on treaties of either military alliance, which was the case of Austria-Hungary and Germany (the Central Powers), or on the treaty of assistance in the case of an attack, which allied Britain, France and Russia (the Allied Powers). The ultimate cause of the war was the intense rivalry and jealousy among European nations, which was caused by both the growing sense of nationalism and an intensified competition over influence. In the centre of the conflict, there was a fight over boundaries, resources, colonies, trades and military strength. Despite the signs of international cooperation, which was carried out in various forms, such as the improvement of communication and the innovation of technologies, the European balance system, that relied mostly on its international agreements and treaties, was destroyed by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.²⁶ Within a period of a few months, other European countries were dragged into the conflict and the slaughter, that lasted from 1914 until 1918, had begun.²⁷

The casualties were great on both sides, as the killings were carried out on a large scale. By the end of the war, tens of millions of lives were lost either on the battlefield, or to the hunger and disease that followed the conflict as an unforgiving shadow. For nearly three years the battle lines were centred in the heartland of France, where the armies often fought over a few yards of territory, leaving behind piles of corpses.²⁸

2.2 American reaction

The barbarism of the war came as a shock to most Americans. However, there was still the Atlantic Ocean, which provided geographical isolation from the armed conflict, and a promise of impartiality, which enabled the government to handle the situation without acting impulsively.²⁹ As the initial shock wore off, and the neutrality was officially proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson in August, 1914, many wrongfully believed that the conflict

²⁶ Gary B. Nash, *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society* (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011), 648-649.

²⁷ Henry Freeman, *American History in 50 Events* (North Charleston: CreateSpace Publishing, 2015), "1917 – America Enters World War I", Kindle. Chapters are listed, the Kindle version does not include page numbering.

²⁸ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 359-360.

²⁹ Nash, *The American People*, 649.

would be either solved by peace treaties or that the impartiality of the American nation would be the final proclamation.³⁰ However, the task of sustaining a neutral approach in regards to the international trade and loans in the era of a global conflict had proven unrealisable.

Shortly before the declaration of war in Europe, the United States faced a serious recession. All over the country, the depressed businesses and heavy industries worked below capacity, and unemployment was on the rise.³¹ As Wilson sought a way of stimulating the national economy, he insisted on the rights to trade freely on an international level with both the Allied and Central Powers. Nevertheless, as the prosperity depended largely on foreign markets, the definition of what laid within the compatibility with the proclaimed neutrality and what did not was constantly questioned.³² At first, Wilson opposed private bank loans to the belligerent nations. The nature of these loans hung dangerously over the edge of neutrality. However, as it became clear that these actions were significantly hurtful to the Allied Powers and that the potential of the American economy remained unfulfilled, Wilson decided to lift the ban on private bank loans in 1915 and continued in the trade expansion to the overseas markets.³³ Due to the so-called Morgan loans, the economy was no longer in depression. The rich gained, and power over the economy and the wartime government agencies were dominated by bankers and industrialists. On one side, there was the blooming wartime economy, where the production was high and the unemployment low, and on the other side, there stood the blue collar workers of steel and coal companies, who gained the absolute minimum in comparison to the aristocratic monopolies.³⁴ Trade policies were not accepted as Wilson initially anticipated, and the European powers interfered with free trade in the form of naval warfare. Eventually, Britain took control over the seas by announcing blockades of both German and neutral ports and remodelling the nature of contraband by expanding its traditional definition in order to prevent any form of aid to the enemy. Germany reacted by yet another blockade of the British Isles and put into motion the threat of submarine attacks. As neutral flags no longer guaranteed safe passage, and the submarines

³⁰ Carol Berkin et al., *Making America: A History of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 481.

³¹ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 362.

³² Nash, *The American People*, 651.

³³ Berkin, *Making America*, 481.

³⁴ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 362-363.

struck stealthily from below the surface, the tension between European powers and the United States grew.³⁵ Despite the fact, that both England and Germany repeatedly violated international law, the value of American trade with the Allied powers increased between 1914 and 1916 from \$825 million to \$3 billion. In comparison, the value of trade with the Central powers declined during the exact same period from \$169 million to \$1 million. The United States gradually exchanged the promise of neutrality for sentiment and growing economy.³⁶ By 1915 United States was shipping a great amount of war cargo to the Allied cause. Consequently, the Central powers, to be more specific Germany, had no intention to treat the United States as a neutral nation. This approach was not utterly unjustified, as the United States supported Germany's enemies both financially and materially. As a result, Germany repeatedly violated American neutrality. The sinking of the British liner *Lusitania* is just one of many examples of threatening actions. Over 1,000 people died, including 124 Americans and the American government blamed Germany for torpedoing a neutral vessel. However, the carried cargo was not entirely of an innocent nature, a fact which the American and British governments successfully hid from the world.³⁷

Wilson opposed any form of intervention even during his re-election in 1916. His idealistic effort to secure a peace conference came into clash with the values of European powers, which claimed that there was no peace without victory. Soon enough, all doubts were removed from Wilson's mind and after the threat of potential invasion of Texas by Mexico, which was to be sponsored by Germany, and many other violations of international law, he asked Congress to vote on the declaration of war.³⁸

2.3 Public opinion

The United States joined the war effort just in time to reverse the outcome in the spring of 1917. The Allied forces were exhausted, and mutinies were occurring in the French army. It was a battlefield ruled by death, decay and deception, and the America troops were to put an end to it once and for all.³⁹ Although the national attitude was slightly leaning in favour of

³⁵ Berkin, *Making America*, 481.

³⁶ Nash, *The American People*, 652.

³⁷ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 362.

³⁸ Berkin, *Making America*, 482-483.

³⁹ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 361.

war due to the several incidents that cost the lives of hundreds of American citizens, there is no persuasive evidence that the public demanded the declaration itself.⁴⁰ The government sought international rivalry in the form of a periodic war that would unite both rich and poor. In addition it would evoke the sense of patriotic interest which would be shared and cherished among all communities.⁴¹ Wilson as well as other pre-war American leaders, continued in projecting the progressive mood of idealistic success, optimism and often unrealistic confidence. However, because the American Socialist Party voted in opposition to the declaration of war, their popularity increased greatly in several areas. German Americans, for example, did express reluctance in regard to their participation in the conflict and Irish Americans held a grudge against Britain due to the suppression of the attempt at Irish independence.⁴² The government spent a great amount of effort to mobilize public opinion. People did not spontaneously enlist for the service or volunteer and so the U.S. government took strong and sometimes even harsh measures to ensure public support. An elaborate propaganda campaign spread through the country with one specific goal – to persuade the citizens that the declaration of war was right. The propaganda also led to the formation of both anti-German and anti-immigration public opinion, which created a firm base of hatred for the post-war Red Scare, race riots and lynchings. When the propaganda failed to shape a steadfast patriotic opinion, Wilson signed the Espionage Act in June of 1917. From now on, anyone who dared to speak, write or act against the policy of war faced penalties up to two decades in prison. Somehow, free speech, argumentation and the right to object became more dangerous than the war itself.⁴³

2.4 Military experience

The military experience represented horrors like no others, but also liberation in the form of adventure and accomplishments. Many American soldiers were energetic young men, with heads filled with enthusiasm and thoughts of patriotic deeds. They all took the same examination in the form of a physical exam and intelligence and psychological tests. The majority of recruits had not attended college or high school and as many as 31 percent of

⁴⁰ Freeman, *American History in 50 Events*, "1917 – America Enters World War I", Kindle.

⁴¹ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 363-365.

⁴² Berkin, *Making America*, 484-489.

⁴³ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 364-368.

them were declared illiterate. Youth gave them strength, propaganda courage and army purpose. They came from a wide variety of social classes and ethnic groups, but in the military service they were all soldiers. The only exception to this was the African American recruits, who were often treated as second-class citizens and were placed under the command of white officers.⁴⁴ Not all recruits fought in armed combat; many stayed behind in the United States. But those who did enter the conflict on the European continent saw their lives either transformed or stolen by the brutality of war.⁴⁵ The American army was tiny at first, and many men were enlisted and drafted just to be quickly trained, supplied and transported to the area of conflict. Thousands of women also joined the military by choice, serving in various capacities.⁴⁶

2.5 American war machine

Millions of men joined the war effort and factories were left with increased levels of production and decreased levels of workforce. Consequently, the trend of employing women accelerated and defied the homebound roles.⁴⁷ Various propaganda urged women to join the mobilising effort. Eventually, many women increased their earnings and found social freedom in the form of economic independence. The American workforce did include women in the pre-war era but the percentage grew with the increased demand for war material and many women shifted their occupation or obtained a better paid position. The blue-collar female workers occupied positions in brickyard companies, munition plants and many others, while the white-collar female employees worked as telephone operators, secretaries and sales assistants. However, the dominant perception of standard women's roles was yet to be redefined by the upcoming era. Moreover, the Nineteenth Amendment was not a direct result of the war effort, but it was merely accelerated by it.⁴⁸

2.6 Legacy of the Great War

World War I ended in November 1918. Thousands of American soldiers and citizens had died and the peace treaty failed in the long run, as it left behind unresolved political and

⁴⁴ Berkin, *Making America*, 486.

⁴⁵ Nash, *The American People*, 658-659.

⁴⁶ Berkin, *Making America*, 486.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁴⁸ Nash, *The American People*, 666-669.

economic issues, which contributed to European instability and eventually resulted in World War II.⁴⁹ America was swallowed up by disillusionment and the aftermath of the war was defined by bitterness. Class awareness was on the rise again and as much as the government tried to sustain the illusion of a classless society, the following era would tear the illusion into pieces.⁵⁰ The traditional presumptions of the Victorian Age were shattered and the social values of order, culture and progress stayed in the hearts of only a few Americans.⁵¹ The temporality of the thrill of war and the persistence of its horrors followed the soldiers, who were for a brief moment national heroes and who unwillingly resembled the illusion of war-time romance. Woman suffrage and prohibition amendments became the divided legacy of the war.⁵² America entered the new era of the 1920s as a leviathan state, shaped by mass culture, prosperity and excessive materialism.⁵³ However, the aftermath of war was also marked by immigration quotas and increased intolerance. Consequently, white supremacy supported mob violence and race hatred. The era of the Roaring Twenties was more than just the standardised picture of wealth and fun; it was also an era of prosperity being concentrated at the top of society.⁵⁴ Fitzgerald wrote in *Echoes of the Jazz Age*, “something had to be done with all the nervous energy stored up and unexpended in the War.”⁵⁵

2.7 *The Great Gatsby* and military experience

In both fiction and reality, the legacy of WWI was divided. National prosperity was not at all national, but rather individual and the patriotic unity quickly faded. The obtained wealth corrupted society and brought a new dream to be shattered by the old money class. There are two characters of *The Great Gatsby* who directly participated in the war effort – Jay Gatsby and Nick Carraway, but the influence of WWI on both characters varies greatly.

⁴⁹ Berkin, *Making America*, 489.

⁵⁰ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 373-374.

⁵¹ Miller, *New World Coming*, 16, Kindle.

⁵² Nash, *The American People*, 673.

⁵³ Miller, *New World Coming*, 16, Kindle.

⁵⁴ Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 382.

⁵⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Echoes of the Jazz Age", Kindle.

2.7.1 Nick Carraway

The story of *The Great Gatsby* would not be told if it was not for its narrator, Nick Carraway. He is a young gentleman who introduces himself in matters of family legacy, education and military experience. He does so within the first chapter and as he narrates about WWI, he ironically labels it as the “Teutonic migration known as the Great War.”⁵⁶ Nick modestly summarises his time in the U.S. Army and he omits further descriptions of his potential heroic deeds. However, what he does mention is the source of his everlasting recklessness: “I enjoyed the counter raid so thoroughly that I came back reckless.”⁵⁷ The extremes of war, whether positive or negative, were imprinted into his memory, and his reshaped character called for a change: “Instead of being the warm centre of the world, the Middle West now seemed like the ragged edge of the universe – so I decided to go East and learn the bond business.”⁵⁸ This passage suggests that the effect of WWI upon Nick was to a great extent self-discovery. His perception of reality was redefined by the brutality of the war, and his character no longer fits into the ordinariness of his native Midwest. There is a point break between him and his prominent family, which he himself defines as “something of a clan that proudly carries on the family business.”⁵⁹ In contrast to his father, Nick is a young modern man. Although not yet stripped of traditional values, Nick’s initial desire to recapture the thrill of the fight leads him on a different path – a path that will eventually collide with the recklessness of the upper-class society.

2.7.2 Jay Gatsby

When the war came upon the United States, Gatsby “tried very hard to die,”⁶⁰ but instead he found an “enchanted life.”⁶¹ He was a first lieutenant when he met Daisy Fay in Louisville, Kentucky. Gatsby became spellbound by the beauty of her world and by the charm of her wealth. However, his past was a tale of half-lies, and his pockets were penniless. The war took lives and spread destruction, but it also gave many young officers the “invisible cloak

⁵⁶ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

of uniform.”⁶² Gatsby remained hidden under the cloak long enough to give Daisy a sense of security and to grasp the fragments of her safe and mysterious world. He lost himself in the dream of her, and once he tasted the tenderness of her youth, he was never free from it again. He did extraordinary well on the battlefield of Europe, but he left behind Daisy, who pressured by the artificial snobbery of her world, began to move “with the seasons again.”⁶³ And so he set off on a journey that led him all the way to West Egg, where he outstretched his hands to the green light at the end of her dock.

⁶² Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 151.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 153.

3 THE EIGHTEENTH AMENDMENT

The United States went officially ‘dry’ on January 17, 1920. The halfway measures of The Wartime Prohibition Act, which was to secure fighting efficiency and strengthen the united wartime psychology, had proven to be incomplete and the government planned to enforce the trend and to make the Prohibition permanent. As the uncompromising war spirit prevailed and the nation was slowly recovering from the horrors of the war, the process of adopting a final legislature in the form of the Eighteenth Amendment accelerated quickly.⁶⁴ The amendment prohibited the manufacture, sale and distribution of intoxicating alcoholic beverages. The Prohibition would later become a perfect example of legislation that ultimately backfired.⁶⁵ The Eighteenth Amendment had many supporters – the anxious middle class society sought a way of imposing order and maintaining social cohesion, the business leaders hoped that it would increase production and efficiency, and various religious groups celebrated the millenarian hope for a sober nation. Their agendas differed, but the overall expectations laid in the promise of recreated community and in the re-establishment of Victorian values. However, where there are supporters, there are often also protesters. The working class opposed the thought of the Prohibition, and the immigrants were resentful as well. Initially, many Americans approached the Eighteenth Amendment as if it was a flouted law. Nevertheless, this trend was a hard one to sustain as the Prohibition made alcohol rather expensive.⁶⁶ Consequently, the alcohol consumption was gradually reduced and the unpopularity of prohibition grew with time.⁶⁷

3.1 The bootlegger’s paradise in the world of *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is a tale of the American dream, but it is also a tale that dwells on the dark side of prohibition. New York became the ultimate playground, where the number of the worst-kept secrets – the speakeasies, grew tremendously. By 1922, there were approximately 5,000 hidden speakeasies, few of which remained open in spite of repeated threats and closures and would later become popular post-Prohibition saloons. Drinking habits of the American society changed wildly in regards not only to the choice of alcohol and the

⁶⁴ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 17-18, Kindle.

⁶⁵ Miller, *New World Coming*, 38, Kindle.

⁶⁶ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 226-231, Kindle.

⁶⁷ Berkin, *Making America*, 509.

frequency of its consumption, but also to the company that shared the bottle. The speakeasies defied the exclusivity of male preserve and flappers joined in on the secrecy. Due to the untasteful nature of homemade alcohol, specifically gin or wood alcohol, the cocktails became extremely popular. Alcohol was mixed with juices, fruits and dairy products to disguise the unpleasant aftertaste of illegal beverages. The society found yet another type of post-war excitement in the form of defying the law. This brought a glimpse of desired thrill, and the thirst for alcohol was satisfied as a manifestation of personal freedom.⁶⁸

Fitzgerald himself was not a stranger to the flamingly young society, and his writings are to some extent as real as social and cultural history can get. The demons of the era sat on his shoulders as he was giving in to the seductiveness of alcohol: “Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better...”⁶⁹ Fitzgerald did not only portray the alcohol consumption as vividly as it might have been, with Tom’s “whiskey locked away in a bureau drawer”⁷⁰ and Gatsby’s bar that was “stocked with gins and liquors,”⁷¹ but he also did not hesitate to project the corruption of prosperity and shortcomings of prohibition upon his main character, Jay Gatsby.

When the liquor could not be manufactured in the United States, it was just a matter of time when a new industry would be on the rise and a new way of distribution discovered. Consequently, the immorality of influential people and the arranged blindness of the prohibition agents gave the lawbreakers an opportunity to work in the shadows, where they would quickly become rich and powerful. Wealth and violence represented the crooked businesses of bootleggers, moonshiners, rumrunners and hijackers.⁷² Jay Gatsby was a “young major just out of the army”⁷³ when he met his maker, Meyer Wolfsheim. He was starving and yet he was holding on to his elusive dreams. He wore his uniform for days because he could not afford any other clothes and wandered the city in search of a job. For

⁶⁸ Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011), chap. 6, Kindle. Chapters are listed, the Kindle version does not include page numbering.

⁶⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Echoes from the Jazz Age", Kindle.

⁷⁰ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷² Behr, *Prohibition*, chap. 7, Kindle.

⁷³ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 172.

a young man, who was recently stripped of his military glory and of the invisible cloak of social acceptance that followed him around in times of his service, the prospect of exchanging honour for pursuits of dreams seemed dangerously intriguing. Gatsby had been already living a life of half-lies, and his fixation on the past and the elusive dream of Daisy shaped his character and with every step he took he sought to be closer to the illusion of his memories. Therefore when he met Wolfsheim, who “raised him up out of nothing,”⁷⁴ Gatsby took his chance of fulfilling his dreams through illegal pursuits. He did succeed in terms of prosperity; however, his social standing was constantly questioned and attacked due to his newly acquired wealth and unknown origins. His mysterious character was an object of numerous gossips, and people whispered about him and argued whether he was “a German spy,”⁷⁵ “a bootlegger”⁷⁶ or whether he “killed a man once.”⁷⁷ However, even wild speculations such as these evoked suspicious feelings in heads of the aristocratic society. And as it is custom to the world of *The Great Gatsby*, the recklessness and decadence of the upper classes crash dreams and lives as if they were made out of porcelain.

During the time of prohibition, there were many ways of acquiring illegal alcohol. The medical prescriptions of liquor were widely abused and often people who had no illness whatsoever contributed to the illicit drinking. The prescriptions would be then taken to a drugstore or a pharmacy, where the pharmacists would sell illegal alcohol over the counter to nearly everyone. Many were aware of these crooked manners and yet the businesses were left alone to flourish.⁷⁸ Even in this case, the fictional subplot of *The Great Gatsby* resembles similar events. As Tom decides to investigate mysterious and newly rich Gatsby, he soon discovers Gatsby’s alliance with Meyer Wolfsheim and after connecting a few dots he unravels the nature of Gatsby’s businesses: “He and this Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drugstores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter.”⁷⁹ It is the prejudice of the cosmopolitan society that creates a culture of distrust, envy and selfishness.

⁷⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 173.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁸ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 233, Kindle.

⁷⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 137.

4 THE NEW PROSPERING ECONOMY

In the aftermath of WWI, the United States began a decade of prosperity and expansion. In comparison to Europe, where the land was devastated, and the workforce suffered significant losses, the United States remained untouched. Furthermore, the American economy drew from the vast amount of local resources, and soon it became superior to the European markets.⁸⁰ Until recently, the supply of American manufacturing efforts consisted predominantly of products that were not designed for the average customer and thereby the demand remained constant. However, with the standardisation of products the consumer-oriented businesses became prominent on the market. Increased productivity brought a decline or stagnation of prices and various shopping trends gained popularity.⁸¹ Within the first five years, a sharp recession interrupted the pattern of national economic expansion. However, the economy quickly rebounded and the era of consumerism, mass production and aggressive advertising was marked by intense cultural conflict and financial inequality.⁸² Eventually, the risky investment practices of banks and corporations, the purchases on credit, inflation and excessive consumption, contributed to the stock market crash on October 24, 1929. The economic problems grew under the golden surface of the Jazz Age, and the overnight evaporation of the American prosperity brought an era of Great Depression.⁸³

4.1 The power of money

New York, the undisputed financial centre of the United States, represented the national power, prosperity and respective businesses in the era of possibilities. The skyscrapers symbolised urbanisation and success, and created a progressive core of the central cities, where they epitomised the architectural advancement and inevitable growth.⁸⁴ To Nick Carraway, “the city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world.”⁸⁵ When the get-rich-quick mania swept across the country, the Wall Street became the centre of it all.

⁸⁰ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 144, Kindle.

⁸¹ Berkin, *Making America*, 500.

⁸² Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 533.

⁸³ Freeman, *American History in 50 Events*, "1929 – Stock Market Crash and Beginning of Great Depression", Kindle.

⁸⁴ Miller, *New World Coming*, 280-281, Kindle.

⁸⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 72.

Average Americans journeyed into the city to follow the path to instant wealth, while their aspirations were based on the promise of the American dream. The United States was a country constituted of hopes and dreams, but the nation appreciated only the purity of dreams and not the instruments of their pursuit.⁸⁶ The premise of instant success led Americans to believe that the speculative opportunities such as buying stocks and selling them for a higher price, were for everyone. Consequently, ordinary Americans who had neither capital nor practise threw themselves into the constantly expanding bond businesses. Furthermore, the young Ivy Leaguers, the children of the social elite and the representatives of aspirations, ventured East to achieve success and gain respect in the financial capital of the United States.⁸⁷ Nick Carraway, a member of a prominent family, leaves his native Midwest and journeys East, where he learns the bond business. His motivation originates in his post-war restlessness, due to which he seeks new forms of thrills and extremes. Throughout his narrative, he takes the train to the city where he sells securities and wanders through the metropole. The potential lucrativeness of the bond businesses surely supported his decision to move East; however, his knowledge of the trading practices is minimal and his initial induction is a purchase of “a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities.”⁸⁸ Moreover, he is not passionate about the subject, and instead he views it as a daily preoccupation. Nevertheless, his decision to learn the bond business in the financial centre of the United States has lead him to a path of social recognition and triggered his involvement in the collision of two extremely wealthy entities.

In the world of *The Great Gatsby*, wealth has a variable value in the hands of various people. Thereby, wealth acquired through instruments of crime and fraud stands worthless in comparison to the inherited and privileged one. Furthermore, the distinction between nouveaux and traditional riches played a significant role in the lives of 1920s society. Gatsby represents the newly rich class, which values the pursuit of dreams, but above all, he represents the purity of intention and the corruption of aspiration. His elusive dream is not worthy of him and his wealth fails to deliver the elusive promise of limitless possibilities. The American society values dreams and sets high expectations when it comes to their

⁸⁶ Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 182, Kindle.

⁸⁷ Miller, *New World Coming*, 278-280, Kindle.

⁸⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 9.

pursuit. However, the predispositions to succeed are distributed unequally and money cannot buy everything. Gatsby became enormously wealthy, and yet his true dream was never fulfilled. And when Nick tells him: “You can’t repeat the past,”⁸⁹ Gatsby incredulously replies: “Why of course you can!”⁹⁰ In his romantic stubbornness, Gatsby believes that through his wealth he can “fix everything just the way it was before.”⁹¹ However, no money in the world can allow him to relive the memory, and the golden princess he fell in love with is long lost in the past. Her shallow personality is a projection of recklessness of the upper class society and the emptiness of the era: “They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”⁹² Moreover, their inherited wealth has enormous value regarding social status, as it is a result of privilege that lasts for generations. The newly rich people are beneath them: “a lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know,”⁹³ and their actions often shatter dreams of others. Consequently, Tom and Daisy drift from one place to another, where they seek excitement and thrills to bring colour to their privileged and yet boring and unhappy lives. They were born in an era that valued dreams and success, but they already had it all once they took their first breaths. Nick bears witness to the cruelty, adultery and cowardliness of the old money society and yet it is the lower class that suffers the consequences. Even the purest of human connections are corrupted once in the hands of the aristocratic society.

The Jazz Age is a glittering image of American history, however, beneath all the sparkle there was injustice, inequality and imbalance. The classes that truly benefited from the national prosperity and urbanisation were the upper and middle classes, while the lower class remained in America’s own valley of ashes.⁹⁴ Myrtle and George Wilson portray the limitations of the lower class. Wilson is a “blond, spiritless, anaemic, and faintly

⁸⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 114.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁹⁴ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 550.

handsome”⁹⁵ man, who works hard in his garage on a daily basis, and whose chances of achieving the iconic overnight success are as thin as air. Moreover, he is a passive character who does not dream excessively of wealth, and who accepts the limitations and burdens of his class. Throughout the story, he suffers consequences for the actions of others and the motivation for his final act of murder comes from Tom, who is the true reason for his suffering. However, his economic insufficiency is partly to blame for the tragedy of Myrtle’s death, and the money he lacked was the money that kept them from going West. Myrtle, on the other hand, desires privilege more than anything else, and she is unable to live within the limitations of her class. Consequently, she tries to rise above her miserable life by sustaining an abusive relationship with Tom. Although her husband loves her, his small paycheck drives her away into the arms of crushing illusion. She is a victim of abuse and manipulation and Tom lies to her and violates her. In her material blindness, she puts herself into a position of someone better than she truly is, and she despises her husband, who is not “fit to lick her shoe.”⁹⁶

4.2 Consumerism and materialism

The United States of the 1920s was an urban culture dominated by the pursuit of standardised goods and gadgets. It was a society that was exposed to an emergence of consumerism and a boom in the advertising industries.⁹⁷ Fitzgerald portrayed it as “the most expensive orgy in history,”⁹⁸ and his own experience with excessive spending speaks for itself. Americans no longer bought products out of need, but for pleasure and entertainment. The relentless purchase of material goods improved the standard of living of upper and middle class families. The supply of modern products and gadgets increased simultaneously with the mass demand, while various products represented a particular lifestyle. People purchased household appliances such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners, and women were obsessed with cosmetics and the latest fashion.⁹⁹ The advertising industry had learned a new way of conveying information and the importance of the ‘ultimate’ consumer played a great

⁹⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 30.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁷ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 538.

⁹⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Echoes from the Jazz Age", Kindle.

⁹⁹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 538.

role in the development of promotion and salesmanship.¹⁰⁰ *The Great Gatsby* demonstrates the wastefulness of consumer culture, and the illusion of happiness that lays hidden in every purchase. Gatsby, Tom, Daisy and Myrtle pursuit products for convenience, pleasure and pride. Moreover, they dehumanise their lives by the appreciation of material goods and they divert from the traditional perception of what is truly valuable. Gatsby displays his belongings to attract his lost love and yet his mansion is routinely filled with strangers. Furthermore, the excess of food, drinks and entertainment at his parties attracts only shallow crowds: “On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d’oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail 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.”¹⁰¹ Prevailing ‘emptiness’ of his home reflects the emptiness of the 1920s society, and his elusive dream of Daisy symbolises the insidiousness of money. Daisy is corrupted by egoism, recklessness and materialism, and she defines the unworthiness of hollow dreams. She is a charming young woman, whose voice fascinates people like a spell, but it is also “full of money.”¹⁰² Her character is divided between two worlds – romance and materialism. When she sees all the wealth that Gatsby possesses, she cries over it as if it all slipped through her fingers: “It makes me sad because I’ve never seen such–such beautiful shirts before.”¹⁰³

4.3 The automobile and American life

The era of consumerism and manufacturing boom was marked by modern technologies. And as industries stimulated the national growth, one industry in particular stood out. The automobiles became one of the most important industries in the United States, and the profitability grew spectacularly.¹⁰⁴ In the 1920s, automobiles were no longer a luxurious item, and as F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote: “As far back as 1915, the unchaperoned young people of the smaller cities had discovered the mobile privacy of that automobile given to young

¹⁰⁰ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 145, Kindle.

¹⁰¹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 44.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation*, 533.

Bill at sixteen to make him self-reliant.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the auto transformed American patterns of living and thinking. The economy thrived due to the additional mobility, while the modernisation offered new possibilities to people from rural and urban areas. The demand for suburban housing increased and cities grew.¹⁰⁶ Consequently, the American landmarks lost the rural touch and the roads were lined with gasoline stations, dinners and dust. During the Jazz Age, the automobile was a profound sign of status and wealth. Advertising agencies designed a new symbol of the era, one that represented liberty, sex, speed and privilege, and one that defined the unstoppable development of technology and mass production. Furthermore, the auto contributed to the overall change in manners and courting habits. Young people, who represented the flaming youth of the society, escaped the traditional values of their parents by driving fast and drinking even faster.¹⁰⁷

F. Scott Fitzgerald creates a portrayal of the machine that goes beyond the standardised description of the automobile and its exterior and interior qualities. He creates a symbolism of hollowness, showiness and materialism. One automobile in particular resembles the hidden corruption of consumerism and excessiveness. Gatsby owns a gorgeous Rolls-Royce in a “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 terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns.”¹⁰⁸ However, as much as the car is gorgeous, it is also extravagant. Each of his material possessions has a superficial quality of glamour and glitz, while it also has an illusive quality of perfection. Nick sees the beauty in both Gatsby and his car, and yet he describes it with a few negatively charged expressions. For example, adjective ‘swollen’ suggests that there is a hidden corruption beneath the surface, and that the world swells with excessive material consumption. Moreover, the ‘labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrors a dozen suns’ hides away the true nature of its owner, while it distracts others by the projection of his enormous wealth. Gatsby tries to fulfil his romantic dream by parading his possessions so that all the world would see. He is so keen on glamorous appearances, that he often goes over the top, and represent the lavishness of the new money society. Consequently, he remains inferior to the old money class and Tom, who drives a

¹⁰⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Echoes from the Jazz Age", Kindle.

¹⁰⁶ Berkin, *Making America*, 503.

¹⁰⁷ Nash, *The American People*, 684.

¹⁰⁸ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 39.

traditional and elegant blue coupé, has no acceptance for the extravaganza of his ‘circus’ wagon.

Automobiles have a great social, cultural and financial value, but they can also be an instrument of harm. In their carelessness and ignorance, two drunken hosts of Gatsby’s party run their automobile off the road. Nick bears witness to another sign of foolhardiness that defines the lives of the upper class society. And as the two hosts stand there and wonder about what just happened, the lack of responsibility and human decency is vividly obvious. In this case, no other harm than material harm was done. However, this event overshadows the destructive strength that a machine can have in the hands of careless people. The imbalance of the society is proven by the brutality of the accident, where the rich drift endlessly to the realms of recklessness, and the poor are left in the dust of the road. And as “Myrtle Wilson, her life violently extinguished, knelt in the road and mingled her thick dark blood with the dust,”¹⁰⁹ the fragility of human life stands powerless to the vast corruption of the era.

¹⁰⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 140.

5 THE NEW CULTURE AND THE CONFLICT WITHIN

5.1 Racial prejudice

The global immigration rates decreased due to the immigration restrictions but the growth of the intrastate immigration caused a social and cultural shock. From 1910 to 1920, the African American population of New York increased from 91 709 to 152 467, and by 1930 it was 327 706.¹¹⁰ New York became a symbol of cultural and artistic liberation, and the new urban life of African Americans gave birth to the Harlem Renaissance. White audiences listened and danced to Jazz and its popularization as a central element of American music has led to the coinage of the term Jazz Age. However, as much as the modern society gained from this literary and artistic movement, the racial prejudice prevailed and fixed its limitation to the middle and upper society.¹¹¹

The Ku Klux Klan spread its influence into the North, and four and a half million of its members set the current for the white supremacy. The equality of African Americans in the white America seemed unreachable, and therefore the blacks unified to survive.¹¹² The Woman of the Ku Klux Klan transitioned from the suffrage movement into the movement of opposing immigration and racial equality, and the privilege of race and nationalism once again belonged to the whites.¹¹³

5.1.1 Racial boundaries in *The Great Gatsby*

Ethnic prejudice does not stand out in regards to the social history portrayed in *The Great Gatsby*, but its importance is equal to the one of the flapper, flaming youth and prohibition. Tom Buchanan, a descendent of an old American lineage, and Nick Carraway, a narrator controlled by ethnocentric views, both project the racial prejudice. Tom manifests the intensified concern with the American society by declaring himself Nordic; a member of the dominant race. Moreover, his pathetic obsession with *The Rise of the Coloured Empires*, and

¹¹⁰ Paul Johnson, *Dějiny amerického národa*, translated by Věra and Jan Lamperovi (Voznice: Leda, 2014), 528-530.

¹¹¹ Berkin, *Making America*, 505.

¹¹² Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, 382.

¹¹³ Kathleen M. Blee, "Women in the 1920s' Ku Klux Klan Movement," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 58, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3178170>.

its content of “scientific stuff,”¹¹⁴ portrays the national clash of cultures and races. His contempt for the other races is vividly portrayed, and whether it is the outrage over the “intermarriage between black and white,”¹¹⁵ or his Nordic legacy, his manifestation of the subject is charged by fear, fury and alleged superiority. Nick, on the other hand, is not directly proclaiming any racial hatred. However, in his mind he is biased and he is well aware of the racial segregation. He portrays people with regards to their ethnic descent, and he does not oppose the aggressive allegations of racial inequality. His class might not be directly outraged and sickened by the ethnic variety of the United States, but he either accepts or ignores the standardised approach to racial prejudice.

Colour symbolism has a great significance to the story. Daisy and Jordan passed their “beautiful white girlhood”¹¹⁶ together, and they grew into women dressed in white. Whiteness has a positive connotation, while grey and black colour carry negativity. However, the purity and innocence of it hides the corruption that lays beneath. Daisy is the artificial embodiment of whiteness that goes beyond the colour of the skin, and her personality and body seems pure to a careless eye. Nevertheless, the corruption of her beautiful white world and its privileges, resembles the irony of white supremacy. Daisy kills and lies and she drifts endlessly through the era as if she could escape her corrupted soul.

5.2 The new woman

Surely, the enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 contributed to the gender liberation, but Americans seem to have missed the monumental potential of the suffrage victory and the matter of full equality remained subdued.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the millions of votes made little difference in regards to the political morality, and many pre-war promises remained unfulfilled. Although women honoured the feminists for past victories, they were not fully conducive to feminism and its repressing values.¹¹⁸ The term ‘new woman’ does not apply to all American women, as it was ruled by class distinction and ethnicity. Moreover, not every woman embraced the modern ways and the traditional moral code was

¹¹⁴ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 19.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁷ Jennifer K. Brown, “The Nineteenth Amendment and Women's Equality,” *The Yale Law Journal* 102, no. 8 (1993): 2175, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/796863>.

¹¹⁸ Miller, *New World Coming*, 262-263, Kindle.

not easily dismissed.¹¹⁹ There were many diverse influences that rattled the traditional patterns of behaviour. Whether it was marriage, motherhood or womanhood itself, the 1920s saw a redefinition of it all.

The United States became an electrified nation in the era of growing economy. As previously mentioned, technologies added means to the national prosperity and as the life of middle class families improved, so did the daily maintenance. Housewives were under constant pressure of the rising standard of cleanliness, and the modern appliances and innovations simplified their efforts. Moreover, advertising businesses created a set of roles for each woman and whether it was the professional woman, the perfect wife, or the beautiful heroine, they all contributed greatly to the growth of consumerism.¹²⁰

In regards to a middle class family, the birth rate declined due to the availability of birth-control and by the 1930s the average number of children decreased from 3,5 to 2,5.¹²¹ The age of marriage dropped in the 1920s, and so did the number of ceremonies sanctified by the church. The overall percentage of married couples increased, and the nature of roles within a marriage changed. However, as the sanctity of wedlock and the traditional values lost its importance, the number of marriage dissolutions began to accelerate. According to traditionalists, the new woman shattered the institution of marriage by her new freedoms. She defied the repressiveness of the Victorian moral code, by emphasizing the emotional and social value of marriage, and by seeking the fulfilment of her personal needs. Nevertheless, the blame cannot be placed on one trend only, as there were numerous factors that influenced the divorce rates.¹²²

Sigmund Freud undermined the Victorian view of sexual morality by acknowledging woman as a sexual being. Moreover, the Freudians linked the sexual repression to anxiety and mental illness, and the public capacity for eroticism grew.¹²³ Consequently, the new women sought economic and social independence as well as sexual satisfaction. A widespread phenomenon of the era was a social trend known as petting party. It was a youngster affair foremost, and it included various types of sexual exploration short of

¹¹⁹ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 138, Kindle.

¹²⁰ Nash, *The American People*, 695.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 129-132, Kindle.

¹²³ Miller, *New World Coming*, 263, Kindle.

intercourse. The sexual revolution was not a cause of divorce, it was merely an instrument of changing expectations about the both single and spousal sex. Furthermore, the mass media and movie industries rarely condoned promiscuity and adultery and the moral endings often celebrated the marital commitment. However, not all women embraced the idea of sexual freedom and the nation stood divided once again.¹²⁴ But as F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote: “You can take your choice between God and Sex. If you choose both, you’re a smug hypocrite; if neither, you get nothing.”¹²⁵ The choices were made and the roaring society of the 1920s bore witness to a revolution in morals. Eventually, the dogma of conservative traditionalists was dethroned, and the obsession with sex contributed to the post-war disillusionment.¹²⁶

Not all American women identified themselves as flappers. Nevertheless, the flapper became a vibrant and indelible symbol of the 1920s. She defied the then prevailing traditional moral code of American society and she rejected the passive roles of womanhood. She thrived in the urban culture and her characteristics were independence, intensity and energy.¹²⁷ She expressed her liberation by fashion, speech and style. The immense change in appearances and manners contributed to the resemblance of youthfulness and attractiveness, while the fast life and its corrupted riches captured the inevitable change in the moral code. The flappers were of a boyish slender figure, for they flattened their breasts, and they wore skimpy skirts and straight dresses. Their bobbed hair freed them from the burden of tradition and their interest in cosmetics and perfumes nurtured the consumer-oriented market.¹²⁸

5.2.1 Girls, women and *The Great Gatsby*

F. Scott Fitzgerald portrays women through the eyes of a male narrator, by which he distorts the essence of womanhood. He illustrates each female heroine in a sophisticated manner, and creates a vivid representation of various social stereotypes. Moreover, he conveys a message of social stigma, and portrays his female heroines with respect to the era. However,

¹²⁴ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 131-136, Kindle.

¹²⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Crack-Up*, "Observations", Kindle.

¹²⁶ Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 104, Kindle.

¹²⁷ Kenneth A. Yellis, "Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper," *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 44-45, accessed April 2, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2710772>.

¹²⁸ Dumenil, *The Modern Temper*, 135, Kindle.

his depiction of woman often carries negative connotation, as he uses various terms in unlike contexts. The term 'woman' is used in reference to the lower class women and as a substitution of the term 'mistress'. On the contrary, the term 'girl' is used in reference to the aristocratic society. Fitzgerald defines the term with adjectives such as 'older', 'young' or 'little', by which he implicates childishness, recklessness and naivety of his heroines.

In the story of *The Great Gatsby*, each of the characters resembles a contemporary social phenomenon. Daisy Buchanan, Jordan Baker and Myrtle Wilson are all women of their era; they are either ruled by the society, or they rule over it. Daisy is a golden girl, who lost control over her world the moment she was born. She loves being adored and entertained, but her personality is a maze of melancholy, and she is "pretty cynical about everything."¹²⁹ Daisy is an insincere woman, whose words are an illusion, and who is unable to accept the consequences of her actions. Furthermore, she defines the recklessness of the upper class and the obsession with wealth and status. She dreams of romance and adventure, but her life is and will remain a tale of emptiness, for she values privilege above everything else.

Myrtle Wilson is a lower class woman who tries to break free from the limitations of her class and who shallowly despises her equals. She does so by committing adultery with a wealthy man. She longs for a new role within the society and she clings to the fantasy of success. However, her trust is repeatedly violated by the same man she so eagerly believes in, and yet she remains blind in her efforts to rise above the crowd.

Jordan Baker is as close to the flapper as a heroine can be. Her personality is not entirely defined by the revolution in morals, but she reflects the modernity and independence of the new woman. Moreover, her appearance of a "slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage,"¹³⁰ is similar to the one of a flapper. She is also a golf champion, and she thrives in her social and economic independence. However, she dominates and tricks people, she does not hesitate to cheat, and she carries traces of the dishonesty and carelessness of the upper class.

¹²⁹ Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 23.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this thesis was to analyse the portrayal of the historical and social phenomena in the fictional narrative of *The Great Gatsby*. The influence of four main historical phenomena on the evolution of the American experience defined the Roaring Twenties as such. The Great War brought disillusionment upon the United States and the search for a new extreme drove Americans into an era of excessive consumption and material obsession. Moreover, the woman suffrage and prohibition became the divided legacy of the war. *The Great Gatsby* portrays the aftermath of WWI with respect to its legacy, however, close attention is also paid to the character development and its direct influence on individual traits. The Eighteenth Amendment has proven to be a flouted law and an opportunity for illegal businesses to flourish. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote a cautionary tale of the American dream, but he also wrote a tale about the dark side of prohibition, and he projected the corruption of it upon his main character, Jay Gatsby. Moreover, alcohol is vividly portrayed in the novel and it is closely connected to the tragedies of the story. The era of the Jazz Age was defined by the new economy. However, not everyone benefited from the national prosperity and its nature has proven to be rather individualistic. The wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few, and the class that fuelled the consumer-oriented markets was the middle one. Fitzgerald created a society of rotten privileges and in his narrative the money has a variable value in the hands of various people. He illustrates the difference between the nouveaux and traditional riches and he portrays the recklessness, cruelty and cowardliness of the upper class. Furthermore, his gentle symbolism reveals the true price for the materialised privileges, which is the emotional emptiness of the era. The society of the 1920s thrived in modernisation, however, there was an intense conflict of tradition, racial prejudice and class awareness within. Tom Buchanan embodies the intensified manifestation of race hatred and alleged superiority, while Nick Carraway has a racially biased mind. The Roaring Twenties saw a redefinition of womanhood, motherhood and marriage. Moreover, the traditional patterns of behaviour were rattled by the new moral code, and the terms such as new woman and flapper troubled the elders. Fitzgerald vividly illustrates the social stereotypes through his female heroines. In conclusion, Fitzgerald evaluates the social ideals of his era and through his own experience and imagination he creates a limited and yet rich portrayal of the Roaring Twenties.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Lewis F. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s*. New York: Open Road Media, 2015, Kindle.
- Behr, Edward. *Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011, Kindle.
- Berkin, Carol, Christopher L. Miller, Robert W. Cherny, James L. Gormly, and W. Thomas Mainwaring. *Making America: A History of the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
- Blee, Kathleen M. "Women in the 1920s' Ku Klux Klan Movement." *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 1 (1991): 57-77. Accessed April 1, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3178170>.
- Brinkley, Alan. *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*. New York, McGraw-Hill, 2014.
- Brown, Jennifer K. "The Nineteenth Amendment and Women's Equality." *The Yale Law Journal* 102, no. 8 (1993): 2175- 2204. Accessed April 1, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/796863>.
- Callahan, John F. "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream: The "Pursuit of Happiness" in *Gatsby*, *Tender Is the Night*, and *The Last Tycoon*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 42, no. 3 (1996): 374-395. Accessed April 2, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/441769>.
- Cullen, Jim. *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, Kindle.
- Dumenil, Lynn. *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1995, Kindle.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Crack-Up*. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2009, Kindle.
- Fitzgerald, Scott F. *The Great Gatsby*. London: Pan MacMillan, 2016.
- Freeman, Henry. *American History in 50 Events*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Publishing, 2015, Kindle.
- Fussell, Edwin S. "Fitzgerald's Brave New World." *ELH* 19, no. 4 (1952): 291-306. Accessed April 1, 2018 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2871901>.
- Hühn, Peter, John Pier, Wolf Schmid, and Jörg Schönert, eds. *Handbook of Narratology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.

- Johnson, Paul. *Dějiny amerického národa*. Translated by Věra and Jan Lamperovi. Voznice: Leda, 2014.
- Meade, Marion. *Bobbed Hair and Bathtub Gin: Writers Running Wild in the Twenties*. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2009, Kindle.
- Miller, Nathan. *New World Coming: The 1920s and the Making of Modern America*. New York: Scribner, 2003, Kindle.
- Mizener, Arthur. *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. London: Endeavour Press Ltd., 2015, Kindle.
- Nash, Gary B. *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society*. Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011.
- Schreier, Benjamin. "Desire's Second Act: "Race" and "The Great Gatsby's": Cynical Americanism." *Twentieth Century Literature* 53, no. 2 (2007): 153-181. Accessed March 2, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/20479804>.
- Yellis, Kenneth A. "Prosperity's Child: Some Thoughts on the Flapper." *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 44-64. Accessed April 2, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2710772>.
- Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States*. New York: HarperCollins, 2015.