

**UNIVERSITATEA „OVIDIUS” CONSTANȚA  
FACULTATEA DE LITERE**

***THE ROARING TWENTIES AND  
CONSUMERISM IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S  
NOVELS***

**SUMMARY**

**Coordonator științific:**

**Prof. Univ. Dr. ADINA CIUGUREANU**

**Doctorand:  
Corina Grosu**

**Constanța  
2011**

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F. Scott Fitzgerald has been recognized by the public and literary critics alike as one of the most important writers of his time, especially for contributing to the creation of the image of the Jazz Age. In his novels, he became a social and cultural historian, reflecting the fundamental changes that began to occur in the 1920s. As such, in his novels, Fitzgerald depicted an entire generation's search for the illusory American dream of wealth and happiness. Most of his novels derived from his own experiences and portray the consequences of his generation's attachment to false values, which were promoted by a new wave of consumerism.

The significant transition in American capitalism, the shift from a culture of production, in which one is valued by what one makes, to a culture of consumption, in which one is assessed by what one consumes determined Fitzgerald to state that: "America was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history" (Fitzgerald in Miller 2004:10). The "spree" Fitzgerald mentions may refer to the economic boom and further immoderate materialism of America in the 1920s. Although spending and excess reached a frenetic rate by the 1920s, this conduct was several decades in the making. The pressure brought by the shift from a culture of production to one of consumption and its consequences represent the essence of most of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels.

The aim of this research has been to apply consumerist concepts introduced by representative figures in order to analyze all the changes characterizing the Twenties in Fitzgerald's novels. Even though Fitzgerald has already been subjected to close scrutiny from a variety of approaches and one might wonder if anything relevant remains to be said on the subject, the consumerist perspective may offer a new, fresh reading of his novels, which have become increasingly popular during the last two decades. Although the first manifestations of mass consumerism appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fact that the term itself was coined in 1915, and was rather simultaneous with the boom of the Roaring Twenties, may lead to the argument that there is an interdependent relationship between the consumerist critical approach, the Roaring Twenties and Fitzgerald's novels. It is for this reason that the consumerist view used in the first chapter of this research may

be considered relevant to demonstrate the strong connection between one of the ideologies of the Twenties, the dynamic spirit of the decade, and one writer of the time, Fitzgerald. As a matter of fact, consumerism became the driving force of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and manifested in all aspects of life.

The paper will focus only on Fitzgerald's novels, because despite the diversity of his short stories, the themes are repetitive and similar to the ones reflected in the novels. The development of the characters follows the same pattern in his entire work, therefore, certain references may be redundant. For instance, Dexter Green in *Winter Dreams* (1922) may be compared to Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Both characters are self-made men, who are eager to rise beyond their status in life and who find personal fulfillment as well as their ideal women intangible. The similarities between *Winter Dreams* and *The Great Gatsby* are not an occurrence, as Fitzgerald wrote the short story while he was developing ideas that would be expressed later in the novel. In *The Rich Boy*, published a year after *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald uses themes like lost youth and disillusionment in marriage which he had covered in previous stories and novels. The theme of the lost youth is to be found in the novel *This Side of Paradise*, and the theme of bad marriage is announcing the novel *Tender is the Night*. In *Babylon Revised* (1931), considered to be Fitzgerald's finest story, he shows how a man manages to dissipate, to make nothing out of something and thus prescribes for himself a future with no direction. The same thing will happen to Dick Diver in *Tender is the Night*, which proves that the ideas developed in his short stories are reflected in his novels and the other way round.

His novels: *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Tender is the Night*, *The Last Tycoon*, will be analyzed through a consumerist approach, centered on concepts like: *use-value*, *exchange-value*, *commodity fetishism*, *work ethic*, *conspicuous waste*, *conspicuous consumption*, *pecuniary emulation*, *a new self*, *alienation*, *marketing orientation* introduced by Karl Marx, Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen and representatives of the Frankfurt School: Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood.

The concepts that have been discussed in the first chapter, "The Capital, Theories of Consumption and Fitzgerald's Fiction", aimed at setting the context of the consumer culture society of the Twenties, beginning with its origin. The first critic mentioned in the

chapter is Karl Marx, one of the most influential socialist thinkers to emerge in the 19th century, who analyzed the problems associated with the process of industrialization and the rise of capitalism. His goal in life was to contribute to the abolishment of the capitalist society and of the state institutions, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, considering that the economic class distinctions are a direct result of capitalism.

Preoccupied with problems associated with the process of industrialization in the early nineteenth century, Karl Marx focused primarily on human labor and the material conditions of production. While his works, *The German Ideology* (1846), *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848) and *Capital* (1867) stressed the ideals of socialism, that wealth should be distributed more equitably, that class differences should be abolished, that society should be devoted to providing for everyone's basic needs, the principles of industrial capitalism were severely promoting clear class differentiation and the unequal distribution of wealth (Rivkin, Ryan 644). Therefore, considering that the economic class distinctions are a direct result of capitalism, Karl Marx attacked capitalism calling for a socialist and communist revolution to erase the Proletariat and Bourgeoisie class divisions and promote equality. Capitalism wealth, according to Marx, is nothing more than "the transmutation of human lives into monetary form" (Marx 1992:206).

In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867), Karl Marx describes the functioning of capitalism in terms like *use-value* and *exchange value* of commodities, where *use-value* is represented by the actual cost of material and production, and *exchange-value* represents the price that an object may attain on the market-place. When selling a commodity, the difference between the *use-value* and the *exchange-value* is considered as pure profit, and Marx coins it as *surplus value*. According to Marx, the concept of surplus value includes the alienation of the worker from the product; in this process of estrangement, man does not experience himself as the acting agent in his grasp of the world and the world remains alien to him. Apart from these concepts, Marx uses the term *fetishism* that he associates with *commodity*, forming the concept of *commodity fetishism*, which denotes the transformation of social relationships, between people into objectified relationships between things, due to the growth of market trade.

Significantly, Marx uses the term *fetishism* almost exclusively in his analyses of religion, referring to the commodity in terms of an equivalent fetish-character. This is an important distinction, and Marx's choice of words reflects his argument that economy had arisen in the place that religion had occupied in earlier periods, where it functioned as the institution from which law was born.

Marx's understands fetishism to be something more than excessive valorization, or overinvestment. Rather, the "the fetish-character which attaches itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced as commodities ... is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities" (165). As Theodor Adorno later summarized the point in a dialogue with Walter Benjamin, "the fetish character of the commodity is not a fact of consciousness, but dialectic in the eminent sense that it produces consciousness" (Adorno in Buck – Morss 121). It is, however, when discussing the money form that Marx discerns the relationship between a misrepresentation and an overvaluation. When money functions as a magical means by which difference can be surpassed, it becomes the object of a wild desire. This desire initially fixates on money's earliest metallic forms, gold and silver, which leads to an aesthetic valorization of precious metals. However, in its truly abstract form, paper money, credit, the commodity makes possible an absolute desire, which Marx, in the *Grundrisse* (1857), had named as "greed" (Marx 1993:222). This greed is always greed for money, for that which can become, by purchasing, anything.

Besides Karl Marx, Max Weber was also interested in the changes brought by industrialization in the early nineteenth century. Whereas Marx's aim was to erase class divisions, considering the proletariat as the slaves of both the bourgeois and the machines, Weber's goal was to understand the source of the new spirit of capitalism, which viewed profit as an end in itself. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), Weber argues that capitalism developed when the Protestant ethic determined a lot of people to start working in the earthly world, developing their own business and accumulating money not for spending but for investment. Weber coined this desire to work, to be productive and to save as *work ethic*, claiming that due to this attitude focused on "work-and-save" ethic, the rise to capitalism was possible. In his study, he draws a parallel between the way Protestantism viewed work and the way this concept of work suffered transformations during capitalism. On the one hand, the

Protestants considered work as part of the economic structure of society, which was ordered by God and whose role was to supply the needs of people and to avoid idleness. On the other hand, capitalists viewed work not as a calling, but as a contribution to the public good. Therefore, Protestant values like honesty, decency and prudent investment are replaced in capitalism by easier ways of making money and by aggressive consumption. While to Marx accumulation of wealth was a sign of greed and lust, to the Protestants, wealth was a sign from God, a blessing.

Being also concerned with the economic class distinctions, Thorstein Veblen referred to the emerging ruling class under capitalism, as the “leisure class”, which was created out of man’s constant quest for wealth. According to Veblen, the emergence of a leisure class coincides with the beginning of individual ownership, which manifests through the accumulation of material possessions. This individual’s need to acquire as many goods as the people around him is regarded by Veblen as *pecuniary acquisition*.

Moreover, he points out that the individual’s aim is not only to compare material possessions and to have as much as the others, but to try to surpass them, this representing the starting point in accumulating fortunes. In *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), Veblen argues that in order to provide an elite social status, people had to display their wealth through two ways: *conspicuous consumption*, defined as the purchase and display of expensive and tasteful commodities, and *conspicuous leisure*, a concept denoting the ability to distance oneself from the sordid details of production through living a life of leisure, learning and travel. In defining the concept of *conspicuous consumption*, Veblen notices that the leisure acquires the best possessions having as main target a higher personal comfort. Yet, this is not the only purpose of consumption. As the acquisition and use of these products is a mark of wealth, consumption turns to be honorific. By analyzing the individual consumption and display of goods, one can tell the wealth and status of a person. In contrast to Weber’s theory of Puritanical self-control, Veblen’s concept of *conspicuous consumption* describes consumerism as a way to express abundance.

To Marx, alienation was not a feeling or a mental condition, but an economic and social condition of the capitalist society. If *alienation*, in Marxist terms, refers to the separation of the mass of wage workers from the products of their own labor, Erich



Fromm's analysis of *alienation* deepened and broadened Marx's initial definition of the concept. Fromm argued that Marx belittled the intensity of alienation which had become "the fate of the vast majority of people, especially of the ever increasing segment of the population which manipulate symbols and men, rather than machines" (Fromm, 1961: 56). In contemporary society, people "worship things, the machines which produce things and in this alienated world they feel as strangers and quite alone" (57). He depicts the power of the concept of *alienation*, extending it from the world of work into the domains of politics, recreation, and intimate relationships. In order to introduce the term of *alienation*, Fromm analyzes one of the fundamental economic features of Capitalism, "the process of *quantification and abstractification*" (Fromm 1979:111). According to Fromm an increasing division of labor triggers an increasing abstractification. Due to the fact that economic activities have become the main preoccupation of man, the process of *quantification and abstractification*, surpassed the sphere of economic production, and spread to the attitude of man to things, to people and even to himself.

Douglas and Isherwood, two other representatives of the Frankfurt School, elaborated in *The World of Goods* (1979) an anthropological approach to the economic attribute of consumption. The two authors argue that consumption should be understood in a context framed by a cultural unit as a *way of communication*. Whereas the economist believes the desire for objects is an individual psychological urge, the anthropologist considers that objects are desired for sharing, giving away or fulfilling social obligations. Thus, they discuss consumption as a mode of communication, where possessions represent an information system. They claim that the acquired goods are appreciated at their real value only by the connoisseurs; commodities speak only to those who are from the inside, who know the social code and can interpret the meanings.

According to Douglas and Isherwood, goods assembled together in ownership make visible statements about the hierarchy of values to which their chooser subscribes. "Goods can be cherished or judged inappropriate, discarded, and replaced" (ix). They both sustain that in order to solve the contradictions of our economic life, we first have to appreciate the way goods are used to form a comprehensible universe. The idea is that no

good carries a meaning all by itself. People must be present at other people's rituals of consumption to be able to circulate their own judgments.

I have chosen these concepts out of numerous other ones because they mostly refer to the rise of capitalism and consumerism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, therefore they may be considered as best suiting the analysis of Fitzgerald's novels. Concepts like *commodity fetishism*, *conspicuous consumption*, *work ethic*, *commodification of culture*, *alienation*, *a new self*, have been used as lenses through which the consumerist dimension in Fitzgerald's novels has been discussed in the subsequent chapter.

The second chapter, entitled "The Roaring Twenties and Fitzgerald's Novels", is a presentation of the changes brought by the consumerist culture in the Twenties: the description of the leisure activities (music, dance, movies, tanning), of the latest fashions (expensive clothes, mansions, automobiles) and of the social trends of the Twenties (the performative self, youth culture) has been meant to underline the importance given to goods in general, as their acquisition and display created the illusory perception of success and happiness.

The various trends and movements of the 1920s that seem to define the era: Prohibition, bootleggers and bathtub gin, the Harlem Renaissance, the Lost Generation, the Jazz Age, flappers, flaming youth, represent as many various aspects of profound shifts in values away from the rigid morality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rejection of tradition and the celebration of the "new" and the "modern" is a general and cultural theme.

Whereas in an earlier era, work and productivity were highly valued, in the Twenties, the focus is laid on leisure and consumption. Recreation activities like dance marathons, sports fields, movie going, traveling abroad, became really popular during the period. All these activities reflected the cultural impacts of consumption, which affected almost all aspects of American life. Dance halls, roadhouses and speakeasies, which were spread all over the country, represented the places where Americans usually spent their leisure time meeting new people, socializing and experiencing new trends and fashions.

The image of the "Roaring Twenties" as a decade of leisure and consumption was also created by the expansion of the American film industry. Films and spectacles are often mentioned in Fitzgerald's novels. Guests at Gatsby's parties include film stars, and Myrtle's first action when she arrives in New York is to buy "Town Tattle and a moving-

picture magazine” (*The Great Gatsby*, 18). In *Tender is the Night*, one of the major characters is Rosemary Hoyt, a beautiful, young American movie star. She studied acting in Paris and she won fame in Hollywood films; one film in particular was *Daddy’s Girl*, which became her big break. Rosemary Hoyt is continually associated with the movies not only because she was an actress and was actually seen on the set, but also because her vision was oddly cinematic. In *The Last Tycoon*, there are also a lot of references to film. This novel is regarded as “the best novel written about movies” (Brucoli vii). The action takes place in Hollywood in the 1930’s and depicts the life of a tremendously successful and popular movie producer, Monroe Stahr. The novel depicts the world behind movies: producers, actors, and screenwriters, each of them trying to assure their place in the movie industry, no matter the means.

Apart from music and movies, the Twenties also meant an expansion of the beach culture. Smaller families and shorter working hours encouraged more people to take family holidays at the beach or lakeside. Acquiring the right color represented a target for a lot of young people, who wanted to attain a cosmopolitan body. *Tender is the Night* reflects the lifestyles and values of people in the early Twenties. The beaches of the French Riviera have been considered the resort of the rich and famous. However, the image of the leisure classes staying all day long under the sun marked a striking new development in the embodiment of class hierarchies, a new social practice that Fitzgerald both meticulously documented and popularized. Sun tanning constituted a change in how the body was conceptualized; the white skin-symbol of prestige was replaced with darker skin as an index of one’s health, wealth and leisure.

Prior to the Twenties, clothes were generally made to fit the person wearing them, but after the concept of standardized sizes appeared, buying ready-made clothes from department stores, became a fashion. Thorstein Veblen’s book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, reached a wide American audience during the Twenties because it addressed the psychology of American consumption straightforwardly. In Chapter VII, “Dress as an Expression of the Pecuniary Culture,” he wrote about the importance of appearance and the fetishisation of good clothes within modern society. Veblen’s treatise provided one of the first analyses of a new aspect of the social and economic order - a society that was also distinctively American. *The Great Gatsby*, with its parties, its shopping trips and dry

notation of prices: Daisy's wedding pearls cost 350.000, its references to golf and cinema and jazz, is one of the major fictional works about the leisure class.

The concept of style was introduced in personal appearance and in home decorating. During the Twenties there was a boom in house building, people wanting to own their own homes; therefore new suburban developments appeared all over the country. Due to the fact that mortgages became more affordable, the average married couple could buy their dream home and purchase the domestic products they needed. People who wanted to make a good impression were concerned not only with the clothes they wore but also with the way they embellished their homes. When decorating them, the focus was less on heavy, ever lasting furniture; it was rather on modern and sophisticated accessories.

As a result of the new technology, electric appliances, the invention of the radio, people's lifestyle changed a lot, spending enjoyable time in their fashionably decorated homes. A consumer product which had also a major influence on family life and people in general, was the automobile. Even though automobiles had been available in America since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was only in the Twenties that the middle-class people could afford to buy one. This thing was possible due to Henry Ford and Alfred Sloan, two representatives of the automobile industry, who invented the serial production of one particular brand.

Fitzgerald, due to the importance of this social fact in the twenties, filled his fiction with names and descriptions of automobiles. To Fitzgerald's characters, the automobile represented the supreme status symbol. A car could reveal the social and financial success of the person owning it. Almost every woman pursued by Fitzgerald's men is associated with an automobile. Isabelle in *This Side of Paradise* is seeing boys who are "terrible speeds" and drive "alluring red Stutzes" (*This Side of Paradise*, 54). Nicole in *Tender is the Night*, arrives at the Pala Hotel in a "magnificent Rolls" (*Tender is the Night*, 149) of gigantic proportions. Kathleen, in *The Last Tycoon*, drives a jalopy, a Chevy "which would have brought eighty dollars from any kindly dealer" (*The Last Tycoon*, 67).

Lifestyle and social trends in the Twenties were also dominated by consumerist values, as people measured their identity according to the goods they owned or desired to

purchase. Due to the values promoted by the consumer culture society, man's character also suffered a few changes. In his hunger for consumption, man turned into a commodity, performing a role meant to raise his value on the social market. Thus, he focuses on his appearance rather than on his internal traits, trying to perform an image that would bring success and happiness in a consumer culture society. Apart from the performative self, youth culture also represents a social trend in the twenties. Due to the rise of advertising and entertainment industry, the idea of youth was turned into a commodity; everything that was worn and cherished by young people was considered new and valuable and became a model for the others.

The third chapter, entitled "Limits of Morality and The Protestant Ethic in Fitzgerald's Novels", has proposed an analysis of Fitzgerald's novels: *The Great Gatsby*, *The Last Tycoon*, *Tender is the Night* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, starting from Weber's concept of *work ethic*. The chapter has focused on the way in which the Protestant ethic was challenged by Fitzgerald's characters, who enjoyed the new spirit of capitalism, by earning money the easy way, and by spending it on various luxury goods. The second part of this chapter has aimed to demonstrate the way sexuality was perceived in capitalism, compared to the Protestant ethic and how the idea of resisting the temptations of the worldly pleasure has changed in time.

The first aspect examined in the chapter has been the way in which Fitzgerald's characters challenge the Protestant ethic by proving to be dishonest and corrupt, earning money and power through illegal means or using them for immoral purposes like manipulating and exploiting people around them. In *The Great Gatsby*, characters like Jordan Baker, Meyer Wolfsheim and Gatsby itself, make money or make use of it in ways that oppose the Protestant ethic. Jordan Baker for instance, challenges the Protestant ethic by both making a sports career and by using improper, unethical ways to win. Similar to Jordan, Meyer Wolfsheim makes use of illegal means in order to fix the World's Series in 1919 and, together with Gatsby, raises money illegally by selling liquor during the prohibition era. All the characters mentioned above undermine the Protestant ethic, which considered that dishonesty, corruption and dissipation were sins that man had to confront and reject.

Immorality and corruption are also depicted in *The Last Tycoon*. Pat Brady is willing to do whatever it takes in order to get the control of the company. Taking into account the fact that he is not interested in making movies for the sake of art but for money and power, it may be argued that he is not "dedicated" to his work. He belongs to the new spirit of consumerism that encouraged people to become successful and powerful. Unlike him, his associate, Monroe Stahr proves to dedicate his life to work, feeling that this is his calling. His work is his life; and he would rather be dead than deprived of it.

One consequence of people's lack of *work ethic* is the invitation to idleness, to a life deprived of work and meaning. Anthony Patch, in the novel *The Beautiful and Damned*, lives a life of leisure due to his monthly budget and to the premise that he will inherit his grandfather's millions. The reasons why he is unproductive are: on the one hand, he considers labor beneath his class, and on the other hand, he has waited for so long to get his grandfather's money that his will to work faded away. Actually, his view on labor is in contradiction with the one exposed by Weber, who considers that work can bring satisfaction and self esteem. To Anthony, work is an unpleasant thing, boring and useless, which consumes one's life. Hence, he decides to live his life at the fullest rather than waste it by working. Both Anthony and his wife Gloria want to obtain money with no work; it is their goal to be rich without any effort. According to the Protestant ethic, wealth was a sin when it meant temptation to idleness and sinful enjoyment of life. Acquisition was regarded as immoral when its purpose is living without worries. Therefore, both Anthony and Gloria through their attitude and behavior strongly challenge the Protestant ethic.

In *Tender is the Night*, almost nobody seems to work, or at least not in a productive way, because money had already been acquired in the past, by the older generations. Therefore, the only concern of the rich people in the novel is to spend it on luxuries, challenging in this way the Protestant ethic which preached prudent investment and the satisfaction of humble needs. At the beginning of the book, the reader might be tempted to say that Dick Diver embodies the Protestant ethic as he appears to be dedicated to his work. Yet, despite the fact that he is said to have a calling, throughout the novel, his wish to be loved and admired becomes stronger than his desire to work and to

be productive. The need for entertainment and the earthly temptations distract him from his career-oriented pursuits and from work in general.

The last part of the chapter has dealt with the interdependent relationship between sex, religion and consumerism. Apart from the conviction that work was a calling and that people had to work continuously and hard to be eventually among God's "chosen ones", the Protestant ethic also preached certain beliefs regarding bodily or worldly pleasures. Thus, worldly enjoyments were forbidden; sexual temptations, for instance, were considered to be sinful and disgraceful. Capitalism created the space that determined the shift from tired, traditional religious views to affluence and materialism.

Whereas with Protestantism, sex outside marriage was strictly punished, with capitalism, premarital sex and sex outside marriage no longer seemed to be out of the ordinary. Meyerowitz refers to the "economic value of dating" (Meyerowitz 52) when women searched for male company in order to have entertainment expenses paid as they could not afford to pay themselves. This is where consumerism meets sexism. People, especially flappers, became aware of the power of sexuality upon someone's life and they began to use sexuality in different ways: as a means of getting something or someone, as a way of entertaining or in most cases as a way to get favors. Any of these reasons would challenge the Protestant ethic, which preached the sexual contact only with the purpose of giving birth to children

The affair between Tom Buchanan and Myrtle Wilson, who belong to different social strata, is based on mutual exploitation. According to the Protestant ethic, Myrtle's behavior proves to be totally immoral, as she rather uses her body to provide material goods and money instead of working hard to get them. The strong connection between sexuality and money is also revealed in Myrtle's death. The car which hits her is yellow, as if it represented the image of gold, of real money. Her death may symbolize that the use of sexuality is just a sure path to decadence and utter destruction. The relationship between religion and money is also relevant, as consumerism seems to have substituted religion. After his wife's tragic death, George Wilson believes that the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, from the giant billboard, represent the eyes of God. If we are to consider George's assertion, then it may be argued that capitalism rules where religion once did and this might explain the immorality of most characters in Fitzgerald's novels. To

Myrtle, money represents the supreme power and by her ignoring her husband's advice of paying attention to God, it may be asserted that she substituted the power of God with the power of money.

The fourth chapter, entitled "Class Distinctions and the Effects of Consumerism", has focused on Veblen's concepts of *conspicuous waste*, *conspicuous consumption*, *pecuniary emulation* and on Marx's concept of *commodification* in all Fitzgerald's novels. The first aspect discussed in this chapter has been the different types of consumption that marked class distinctions and, therefore, became characteristic of the different social classes. Whereas the leisure class used *conspicuous consumption*, among their preoccupations being warfare, religious observance, politics, learning, sports and traveling, the middle class and the newly rich used *conspicuous consumption* and *pecuniary emulation*, making desperate efforts to acquire expensive objects in order to display their wealth and to emulate a higher social class. These class distinctions and characteristics are to be found with Fitzgerald's characters, as well.

Thus, characters like the Buchanans in *The Great Gatsby*, the Warrens in *Tender is the Night* and the Blaines in *The Beautiful and Damned* are all belonging to the leisure class, distinguish themselves by style and refinement, typical qualities of those who were born rich. Due to their inherited fortunes, they are compelled to work or to do any productive activity; their only concern is the direction of wealth rather than its creation. Unlike them, Gatsby has to consume in ways that can assure him a class and a status. He has to prove that he is rich by acquiring expensive clothes, fancy cars and a huge mansion. As consuming is not enough, he also has to display all his material goods in a very ostentatious way in order to create a new identity that would assure his admission in the "aristocratic" class. In this respect, the quantity of possessions is also important, as it is meant to impress the others (especially Daisy) and to give the sensation of abundance and excessive wealth. Not only is he obsessed with appearing wealthy, but he also takes great efforts to make people believe that his money is old. In order to be credulous, Gatsby invents his own past, being aware of the fact that tradition plays an important role in a consumerist society; old money is considered to be more valuable compared to new money. Nevertheless, people belonging to the leisure class, like Tom Buchanan, can



make a distinction between the imitator and the original and, despite Gatsby's efforts, it is impossible to change history and surpass one's inherited social status.

The second part of the chapter has analyzed the effects of consumerism: on the one hand, people are turned into commodities and on the other hand, all the relationships in Fitzgerald's novels seem to be doomed. Being focused on acquiring wealth and displaying money and power, people have forgotten about the essential things of life, and, generally, they end up empty and unfulfilled. Through Marx's concept of *commodity*, it has been demonstrated that people are dehumanized, while things appear to take on animate power. The more people lose their subject position and become objects, the more objects shift into subject position. Hence, social relations are transferred from people to things.

Marx's theory has been applied to all Fitzgerald's novels. The majority of characters are obsessed with materialism and consumerism and, consequently, they show the tendency to value human beings in economic terms. They treat people as objects, considering that everything and everyone can be bought and sold in a consumer culture society. Having analyzed all characters in Fitzgerald's novels, it may be argued that everyone is using everyone else in order to get what they want.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Tom is using Myrtle to get sexual favors, whereas Myrtle is using him to assure a better material life. In *Tender is the Night*, Dick Diver, is turned into an object by the Warrens, who consider that the best solution for Nicole's recovery is the marriage with her psychiatrist, while Nicole Warren is at her turn commodified by her own father. After Mr. Devereux initiates an incestuous relationship with his daughter, all he does is to invest a large capital in her recovery, considering that money can fix everything, including her daughter. Rosalind, (*This Side of Paradise*) is turned into a commodity by her own mother, Mrs. Connage, who invests a lot in her, in order to turn her into a luxury item, desired by rich men. The merchandise has to be sold while it still has a high value on the market and Rosalind is warned by her mother to be careful not sell herself cheaply. Gloria Gilbert, (*The Beautiful and Damned*), becomes a commodity in the eyes of Bloeckman, a very rich man. To him, Gloria represents the trophy wife, just as Daisy is for Tom in *The Great Gatsby*. Both are women who are taken as wives in order to be exposed and to ensure their husband's high value. In *The Last Tycoon*, the

novel that focuses on the glamorous, but corrupt Hollywood, people are turned into commodities and used as long as they are new and shiny. When they are on top, their market value is really high and producers are willing to pay large sums of money to purchase them; when their moment passed, they were thrown away without any remorse and never remembered. Martha Dodd is an example of actress, who once had success and is now trying hard to persuade producers to give her a role, in order to earn her living.

As regards the social and family relationships in Fitzgerald's novels, it may be stated that the pursuit of money and power may lead to ruined relationships and self destruction. In *The Beautiful and Damned* for instance, Anthony and Gloria ruin their love and become two strangers because of their obsession with money. This obsession proves to be deeper than their feelings of love, even if they get into money, at the end of the novel, they become empty and miserable. Similarly, in *Tender is the Night*, the relationship between Dick and Nicole is consumed to its end, even if at the beginning of the novel they seem to really be in love. The fact that they turn each other into commodities affects not only their relationship, but also Dick's life and career.

The last chapter, entitled "The New Woman", has focused on Christopher Caudwell's concept of *a new self*, applied to Fitzgerald's construction of characters. Taking into account Caudwell's theory that literature holds a mirror up to the historical world, it may be asserted that the new woman emerging in the twenties represents "a new self". This new self is revealed by Fitzgerald's female characters, who become active participants in the consumer culture society. The question rising in the first part of the chapter is whether women's free will is allowed to act freely under capitalism, or, despite women's apparent independence, their choices are actually imposed by the family or the society.

In Fitzgerald's novels, female characters like Daisy Fay and Rosalind Connage, seem to make decisions in life that are, in a certain way, imposed by the power of capitalism. Despite the fact that they are in love with men belonging to lower social classes, they rather choose to marry men for whom they do not feel too much but who are in possession of huge wealth than to romantically give up their privileged position in the society. This proves that even though Daisy and Rosalind may allegedly use their free will and follow their heart, the consumer culture society imposes its own choices, by

encouraging people to purchase money and power in view of happiness. Money over love supports, and is supported by consumerism and early capitalism.

Erich Fromm's concept of *alienation* has also been applied to some of Fitzgerald's female characters from novels like *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, with a view to proving that, in their pursuit of wealth and power, women are willing to sell themselves on the market, which leads both to alienation and self-alienation. In *The Sane Society* (1955), Erich Fromm discusses the concept of *alienation*, claiming that by alienation an individual becomes "estranged from himself" (Fromm 1979:120). Muriel Kane and Gloria Gilbert, in *The Beautiful and Damned*, and Rosalind Connage in *This Side of Paradise*, are perfect examples of flappers, who become obsessed with the way they look and with the way the others perceive them. They focus on appearance and they are in a continuous struggle to create a perfect image accepted by the consumerist society, becoming in this way estranged from their own selves.

The last part of this chapter has focused on Douglas and Isherwood's idea that people may be regarded as both consumers and fine observers of a *certain social code* in two of Fitzgerald's novels: *Tender is the Night* and *The Great Gatsby*. In *Tender is the Night*, the young starlet, Rosemary Hoyt, is not necessarily identified with the image of a perfect consumer, but rather with the image of an attentive observer of the people and commodities surrounding her. The scene in which Nicole and Rosemary go shopping is relevant in this respect. Even though Rosemary does not have access to buy the kind of goods Nicole purchases, she proves to be a connoisseur as she is able to read their significance and decode their message, in order to identify the owners' social status. Like Rosemary, Jordan Baker (*The Great Gatsby*) is an observer of the upper class and their luxury possessions rather than a consumer. She admires Daisy and what she possesses even before marrying Tom, considering her one of the most fashionable girls in their generation, a girl who owned a fancy car and the largest lawn.

After reading and analyzing Fitzgerald's characters through the lenses offered by the consumerist concepts mentioned in the second chapter, it may be concluded that Fitzgerald's novels are powerful and captivating precisely because their critique of American capitalism and consumer culture is not didactic or explicit. The novelist neither ignores, nor belittles American enchantment with commodities. In the "Crack-

Up”, Fitzgerald claims that “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function” (Fitzgerald in Wilson 1993:69). This attitude is reflected in his complex approach of American capitalism and consumer culture. He captures the temptations of the world of wealth, being aware of its glamour and beauty and yet, he admits that apart from its glitter, this world is based on the exploitation and manipulation of the others.

The frenetic times inspired Fitzgerald for the basic themes of his writing and, in developing them, it may be argued that Fitzgerald is, in effect, recording the details of the times for posterity. Fitzgerald depicts Dick Diver, the American whose soul is for sale; Gatsby, the American who believes money will buy everything; Tom Buchanan, the American who trusts explicitly in the power of his wealth; Myrtle Wilson, the American woman whose pursuit for money results in infidelity; Rosalind Connage, and Daisy Buchanan, examples of American women who are ready to let go of true feelings in favor of money and position; Anthony Patch, the prototype for the idle man; Pat Brady, the typical Hollywood producer, who is ready to do whatever it takes in order to increase his profit. Despite their different social class, all these characters have in common a strong consumerist drive which triggers their impulsive actions and materialistic behavior.

Fitzgerald himself was part of the age he described, The Roaring Twenties, experiencing along with his flapper wife Zelda, the wild living of the period. Most of his stories were derived from his own experiences and portray the consequences of his generation’s adherence to false values. Nevertheless, he was simultaneously “within” and “without”; in spite of taking part in the consumer culture society of the Twenties, he wrote with striking objectivity about its effect on people as though he were just an observer. Autobiographical or not, Fitzgerald’s writings have proved to be vivid representations of the life and times of America during the Twenties.

Taking into account the fact that consumption, materialism, status symbols and advertising are central aspects of our postmodern daily life, it may be argued that the consumerist lenses offer a coherent historical, economic and cultural approach, as it has been one of the dominant driving forces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, by bringing Fitzgerald’s novels in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one may wonder if his recurrent themes and the consumerist concepts discussed may reveal similarities with the same decade, a century

apart. A further study comparing the reality of Fitzgerald's novels with the reality of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may lead to daring comparisons and challenging arguments about the repetitive characteristics of booming periods in consumerist societies and the resurrection of character types not too distinct from the ones described by Fitzgerald in the novels of the Jazz Age.

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