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# A Dualistic Approach to *The Great Gatsby* *Internal and External Perspectives*

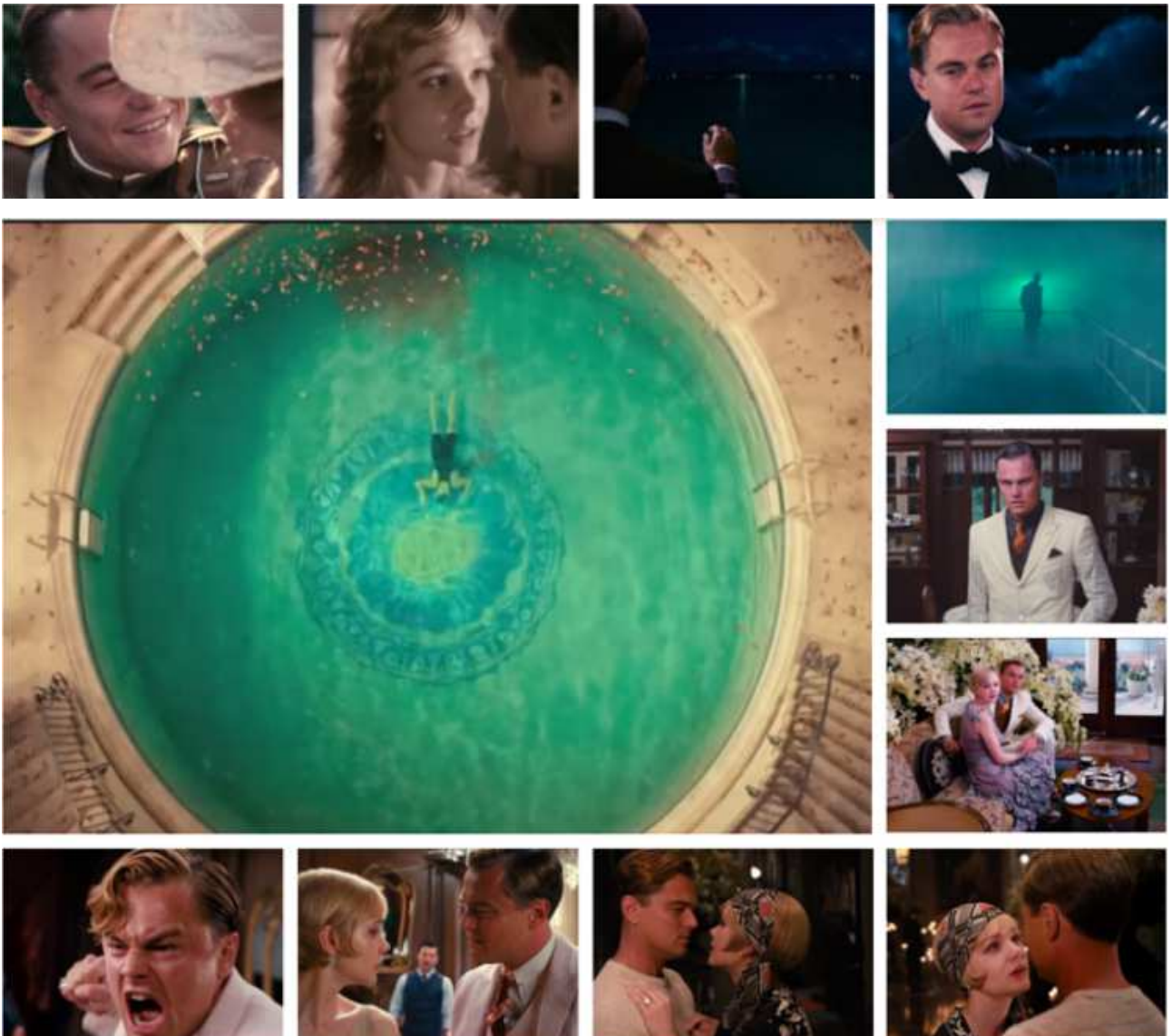
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## Abstract

This project examines F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* and the historical, cultural, and societal periods surrounding, following its publication on April 10, 1925. Specifically, the Roaring Twenties (1920-29), the Great Depression (1929-39), and World War II (1939-45), in light of the wonder that it started out with lackluster reviews and only meager sales but later rose to international fame and popularity as the literary phenomenon we know today, all within the span of this specific generation. Applying a dualistic approach to the analysis, the project seeks to both study the literature and the culture, by introducing two different but complementing theoretical perspectives: The psychological perspective and the Marxist perspective. This is done to make sure that both the novel and its characters are analyzed from both an internal and an external perspective, to increase and to expand the understanding of Fitzgerald's literary work and its impact on American culture and society. The project concludes that a reason the novel was not popular when it was first published is that the materialist and consumerist generation of the Roaring Twenties primarily identified with Daisy over Gatsby - and the way she chose her safety and esteem needs met with Tom Buchanan over her love needs and a life with Gatsby. Hence the perception and interpretation of a character like Jay Gatsby has changed radically through years of cultural and societal upheaval, which eventually caused the novel to finally be accepted and appreciated. In the 1920s, Gatsby was primarily seen as a critique of the lavishly spending and materialistic status quo, and people did not care much for that because of a bad social conscience, or they simply did not understand the critique. But later, in the 1940s, the American outlook had changed forever and so had their view of Gatsby, enthroning him instead as a hero, an icon and idol, and as a role model.

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## 1. Introduction

In the Spring of 1925, the young American author F. Scott Fitzgerald was met with great expectations. A defining writer of the Jazz Age and a member of the so-called Lost Generation, alongside such names as Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck. Fitzgerald had already published two critically acclaimed novels, *This Side of Paradise* (1920) and *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), respectively, and on April 10th of that year he aspired to do it once more. *The Great Gatsby* was published as planned, but it only sold poorly and received lukewarm reviews from its critics, citing it was not nearly as good as its predecessors, and hence it quickly fell into oblivion. Fitzgerald died fifteen years later, at the age of 44, a broken man. He had spent his last years in Hollywood, trying to earn a buck, and caring for his beloved wife, Zelda, who was mentally ill. Sadly, he died too young and never got to experience the phenomenon his formerly disregarded 1925 novel soon would go on to become. From the 1940s and onwards, *The Great Gatsby* rapidly rose in popularity in the United States and all over the rest of world, not only regarded as Fitzgerald's own personal magnum opus, but as a centerpiece in the American literary canon and one of the primary contenders for the exclusive title as the "Great American Novel". The novel is commonplace in most high school classrooms, and has been adapted for the big screen on several occasions, most recently in Baz Luhrmann's version from 2013 in which Leonardo DiCaprio played the title character. Practically any person who has been so much as near a class on American literature knows the story of the eponymous Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, an equally rich and mysteriously self-made businessman who throws a bunch of lavish parties at his mansion household, all to catch the attention of the young and beautiful Daisy Fay from East Egg across the bay. Daisy, however, is already married to the powerful Old Money millionaire Tom Buchanan, and the ensuing battle for Daisy's favour between him and Gatsby ends very tragically for the latter.

Following this, the paper includes an analysis of mainly Jay Gatsby, but other characters are also part of the analysis as well. The analysis is based on a dualistic theoretical

approach, which means that the analysis is done both from an internal and external perspective. The internal perspective is based on an detailed understanding of Maslow's theory of human needs, and on a psychological understanding of materialism that is mainly based on Tim Kasser's book, *High price of materialism*, which was written in 2002. The external perspective is founded on a Marxist theoretical understanding, and also on an understanding of the American Dream as an ideology. Moreover, this paper also has a focus on three periods in American history - the Roaring Twenties (1920-1929), the Great Depression (1929-1939), and World War II (1939-1945). From the understanding of these three period, and the entire paper, a comprehension will be gained as to why the book did not become popular until many years after it was first published.

## 2. Problem Area

The project at hand is primarily concerned with *The Great Gatsby* and its immediate cultural context, namely contained within the following three historical periods: The Roaring Twenties (1920-1929), the Great Depression (1929-1939), and World War II (1939-1945). The goal is to understand the novel as well as its characters, mainly Jay Gatsby, and the influence it has had on the cultural movements of its time and vice versa. We believe that it is continually important to remember to rise above the literature itself and study all the connections from a bigger perspective. So, the project aims to understand the Great Gatsby both from the book itself, but also from a cultural understanding of the three previously mentioned periods. Gatsby is arguably one of the most complicated characters in literary history, not so much because of his representation in the text itself, but because of the many very different ways this has been read, resulting in countless interpretations of him by the shifting audiences of the novel. Like so many others, Gatsby has been understood in a number of different forms, most centering on him as a fool-hearted romantic and tragic hero. This project incorporates two contrasting and as such complementing perspectives in the analysis of *The Great Gatsby*; two different

points of view or frames of reference. Firstly, we read the novel in light of a psychological angle, and secondly we introduce the Marxist perspective or the so-called ideological angle. Applying these two completely different points of view and their respective theoretical backgrounds, all of which are thoroughly explained, will help us gain a novel understanding of *The Great Gatsby* and its characters, through which we are able to answer the research question.

All of the above is aligned with a handful of general themes, used as common threads through the project, such as materialism, consumerism, money, spending, and how all of these come together to form certain ideals behind the American Dream.

## **2.1 Research Question**

Why was *The Great Gatsby*, when it was published in 1925, initially not the success it would later go on to become, and how can this change in interpretation be explained, based on an internal and external understanding of the book and the culture of the periods from the Roaring Twenties through the Great Depression to World War II?

## **3. Motivation**

The use of two such different perspectives in an analysis of *The Great Gatsby* has many reasons behind it, but mainly it has been done so because of how the psychological angle and the Marxist angle complement each other. Theoretically, they far from see eye to eye on the hows and whys of the general Gatsby understanding, and this is basically why they work great together. Practically disregarding each other, they instead illuminate the novel in two completely different ways, which in turn will grant us a more complex understanding altogether and a grasp of how the culture surrounding *The Great Gatsby* changed through the years. Interestingly, the two theories were in their own ways very popular in the same historical periods with which the project is primarily concerned, which naturally also serves as part of our basic motivation. Essentially what the two aforementioned angles provide is

an internal perspective and an external perspective, respectively. While the psychology is concerned with what happens inside the Gatsby character, what his needs are and why he acts as he does in the story, Marxism practically disregards the character's inner workings and is instead concerned with what happens on the outside, in the context, and with his impact on society and consequences for the community. These two perspectives naturally lead to very different understandings of the novel itself, but are in turn also capable of helping us understand the reaction with which the novel was met by its audience.

#### 4. Delimitation

In this project we work with *The Great Gatsby*. Other novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald are mentioned, but only in passing reference, and are not directly included in the analysis; this is the same case for other writers of the same period, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, John Steinbeck etc., although their work might have been just as defining for the time as Fitzgerald's. As mentioned above, we are primarily concerned with three specific decades - the 1920s, 30s, and 40s - with special regard to the often loose cultural transition from wartime to peace. The interbellum is of course our main focus, however we do reference the time during World War I and especially World War II. Geographically speaking, we focus on the United States; even though Europe had a special place in the heart of F. Scott Fitzgerald (and contributed to his expatriate Lost Generation identity), and he did a lot of his early writing there, we instead concentrate solely on the historical, cultural, and societal movements and changes in the American context. We have a dualistic approach to the analysis, both in terms of analytical material and theory. First of all, it is important for us to include both the literature and the culture in our analysis - this dualism is what gives the analysis relevance and meaning. Secondly, as mentioned above, we feel that the dualistic theoretical approach is the best way, given the logistics of such a project, to understand the novel and its characters without either leaving out too much or over-complicating things with too many eyes on the material. Many different theories have been considered

in the work process, but because of their polarized and therefore complementing nature we have chosen the psychological perspective opposite the Marxist perspective.



## 5. Historical Periods

### *Three Cultural and Societal Periods in 20th Century America:*

The following section of the project contains a comprehensive introduction to three distinct historical periods in the American context that are particularly important in relation to the understanding of *The Great Gatsby* and F. Scott Fitzgerald himself: The Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and World War II. It was during these approximately twenty years that *Gatsby* was first published, initially was panned by critics and practically ignored by its potential audience, and later rose to the literary prominence for which we know it today. On the coming pages we will take the reader through these three periods and explain some of their most relevant cultural and societal characteristics, especially those of which relate to the overall concept of materialism.

### **5.1 The Roaring Twenties**

The first of the above-mentioned periods, the Roaring Twenties, is otherwise sometimes known interchangeably as the Jazz Age or as *les années folles* (French for: "the mad/crazy years"). This is a term in American and Western history in general that largely – naturally – coincides with the 1920s and some of the primary historical developments that took place during this century, such as the fact that the Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution went into effect (January, 1920) and the start of the prohibition on alcohol in the United States, or the election of Warren G. Harding as president (March, 1921), beginning three consecutive terms of Republican rule. Some scholars argue that the culture that defined the period began taking form in the extremely emotional time immediately following the end of World War I (November, 1918), then known as 'The Great War', while most agree that the period formally ended with the stock market crash on Wall Street, also known as Black Tuesday, on October 24, 1929. The Roaring Twenties was the historical period that defined, and was itself defined by, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), F. Scott Fitzgerald, and other authors, such as Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, belonging

to the contemporary literary period, popularly referred to as the "Lost Generation"<sup>1</sup>. The 1920s served as the primary backdrop for these authors as well as their early characters. Like most major cultural and societal changes and periods in the United States history, the Roaring Twenties were primarily motivated and driven by changes in the economical system – or, as we shall call it, getting economically acculturated. In the years immediately following World War I, the United States changed forever (Allen,1931:"II. Back to Normalcy", 2-7). It was in this period the country became, molded itself, into what we know today. The country was amongst the victors of the war, and following a brief period of recession – common in wartime and post-war situations in general – America rose dramatically in the international economical ranks, and eventually it became the richest country in the world (with its immediate industrial competitions, most European states at the time, Germany in particular, in ruins) and firmly established itself as the world's foremost superpower. It was in the 1920s that Americans of practically all social and economical standings developed never-before-seen capitalist tendencies and began delving into booming materialism and consumerism in an extremely successful transition from wartime to peacetime (Kyvig, 2002: 1-20).

Another contributing factor was, of course, the Prohibition. When in January, 1920, abstinent interest groups, mostly women and most from the rural Protestant Midwest, got the so-called Volstead Act passed in Congress with the Eighteenth Amendment to the American Constitution, it meant an almost fourteen year long nationwide ban on the distribution and sales of alcoholic beverages, with only few exceptions. It lasted almost all the way through 1933, and changed the face of America entirely, especially the big cities on the East Coast, New York for example, and in-land Chicago (Allen,1931."X. Alcohol and Al Capone",1-7). In these places, crime was already far from a new concept. Street gangs were common, and they fought each other in brutal territorial wars. Organized criminal networks began shaking down the many different ethnic neighborhoods, home of the poor,

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1 Several actors go into defining the so-called "Lost Generation", the most common being the authors that came of age and/or served in the military during World War I (Fitzgerald, Hemingway), and then began challenging and redefining the very idea of American identity in their own image, usually critically, and many as expatriates in such intellectual environments as Paris, France, or other European cities.

often illiterate masses that had immigrated from such places as Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe in the last 20-30 years. To them, this was the dark reality of the American Dream. With the Prohibition, however, these criminals, gangsters, hoods, found a new economical outlet. They became bootleggers – that is, smugglers and distributors of alcohol, often from Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean, sometimes even home-brewed, to the small illegal bars and speakeasies. The price of a glass of Scotch or wine was sky-high, yet the American populace drank more than it ever had before (Kyvig,2002:139-158). This was the time of young American authors, like Fitzgerald and Hemingway, as well as the reality of many of their early characters, including Jay Gatsby. In the novel, the Prohibition is toned down almost completely, but lurks somewhere in the background of the set with characters such as Gatsby himself, whose mysterious riches must come from somewhere. And, his boss, mentor, and father-figure Meyer Wolfshiem, who is the spitting image of one, if not more of the era's infamous gangsters<sup>2</sup>. And that is just it: the gangster. He, the outlaw criminal, became the symbol of the 1920s, an increasingly popular trope in literature and in the – at the time – newly established cinematic experience. The gangster, clad in a Fedora and striped suit, wielding the classic Tommy Gun, became the new interesting anti-hero, replacing the ever so popular outlaws of the Old West, and to some they meant the embodiment of the American Dream. The Prohibition and the people who lived by its basic rules and conditions became symbols of a culture where it is considered admirable to always seek upwards in society, and where earning a lot of money is the easiest way to climb this societal ladder, even if it means playing by your own rules, outsmarting your fellow man, and even breaking the law – all in the name of successful striving. Gatsby, though not an actual gangster, per se, is an example of this development. The Roaring Twenties became a decade of spending. While the average American was not exactly rich – nor did their wealth compare to that of later periods, say, today – the middle class prospered quite a lot in the favorable economic climate of the 1920s and

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2 In the novel it is stated that Wolfshiem fixed the World Series of 1919, something usually said in the real world about Arnold Rothstein, a Jewish American gangster who controlled most of the gambling that took place in New York in the beginning of the 20th century, and who became a pioneer in the bootlegging industry and the mentor of many ambitious young hoods; some of whom went on to become some of the richest and most powerful criminals in American history.

steadily grew in size, absorbing large elements of the former working class, and many people left the countryside for the bigger cities in long periods of determined urbanization. Americans in general had more money in their hands than before, and many were for the first time ever confronted with the basic concept of 'excess'. Many people earned more money than they could spend in their average citizen lives and were now able to save up for later, harder times, or for the many new commodities and products that were invented, grew popular, or had formerly been viewed as too luxurious for the common people. It is a characteristic trait of any period of economic growth akin to the Roaring Twenties that the general public gets its hands on some of the luxuries that were before reserved only for the richest people. There are quite a few examples. The first and foremost, of course, would be the automobile industry (Ibid.:21-35). While practically all aspects of American industry blossomed in the 1920s, the automobile manufacturers – the Ford Motor Company, for example, applying its well-known and, at the time, innovatory technique of assembly lines for mass production – beat all former sales records. The American public really embraced the idea of having cars for private use. The United States became a nation on wheels. This is similarly mirrored in *The Great Gatsby*. When Nick Carraway first arrives at his new accommodations in West Egg on the first few pages of the novel, one of his first priorities is getting a car ('an old Dodge') even though he is a young able-bodied man of 29 who lives alone and in close proximity of public transportation frequently used in the rest of the novel. We do have to remember that Nick is a Yale graduate of an ambiguously wealthy Midwestern background, and while he is not wealthy himself – nor even among of the *nouveau riche* of West Egg (Jay Gatsby, for example) – he does have a presumably well-paying job with the bond business on Wall Street<sup>3</sup>. However, it is fair to say that Fitzgerald uses Nick and several other of *The Great Gatsby* characters as examples of how even very young people tend to prioritize differently with their finances than they would have, say, before World War I. The Roaring Twenties also saw the rise of many other, smaller products and commodities. It was in this period that most people in

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<sup>3</sup> He is able to pay the rent, 80 dollars, all by himself. 80 dollars in 1922 would accumulate to about 1.100 dollars in 2016, or more than 7.000 Danish kroner (DKK). (<http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>)

the United States, especially in the cities, had electricity installed in their homes, and with it followed a whole bunch of new technologies, such as the use of telephones, radio, refrigerators, and even air conditioning (Ibid.: 43-58). The Americans went out on the town much more than earlier, celebrating their newfound excess, and spend their money at luscious parties, on – as mentioned above – the very expensive bootlegged alcohol, or at increasingly popular new venues such as the motion pictures. Spare time, vacations, and travelling – with airplanes, even, another new invention that really saw the light of day in the 1920s – all became much more commonplace activities. All of this goes together as a picture of the Roaring Twenties as an era of extreme changes in the economical culture of a society on the rise in the world, with materialist and consumerist tendencies becoming normal parts of everyday American lives (Ibid.: 91-100, 115-120, 159-169).

## **5.2 The Great Depression**

When the period known as the Roaring Twenties was coming to a close, both technically, year-wise, but also as the cultural movements that had defined it were dying out or slowly changed into something different, few Americans – people all around the world, really – knew what was in store for the near future. Once more, it was economics that changed the face of the United States and controlled its cultural tidings. If the 1920s had been one great big party, the Great Depression – the name of the period that ensued when the decade was almost over, in late 1929, and lasted through most of the 1930s and, it is argued by some, even through World War II – was a spectacular hangover. Not that there necessarily was any direct connection between the harsh economic situation during the Great Depression and the easy living of the years that came before, defined by materialism and consumerist spending-sprees, but the many Americans who had to live through the 1930s and endure the sometimes brutal conditions might very well have thought so and therefore have felt a slight sting of bad conscience for the more happy times past, having lulled – like so many others – into a bliss state of blind naïvety for what the future might bring.

The following section will give a brief overview of the Great Depression. As early as August, 1929, the world economy began to stir in the early stages of the recession to come, but it was not until two months later that people, Americans especially, really started to feel its impact and repercussions. It all took place during the last week of October, the events collectively known as the great stock market crash on Wall Street. On Tuesday October 29, later given the name 'Black Tuesday', the prices on stocks plummeted following many weeks of economic unrest and the panic inspired in shareholders as a result, prompting them to sell as fast as possible (Allen,1931."XIII. Crash!",1-4). Considering the period to which Black Tuesday was the starting signal, ten years (or more) of economic recession and chaos, worldwide, the Wall Street crash of 1929 is regarded as the worst of its kind throughout history; perhaps only rivalled by the recent financial crisis of 2008. A popular myth has it that people flung themselves from the windows of the many stock market strongholds on Wall Street in the days of the crisis. While this is not true, per se, the suicide rate rose significantly in the United States in the following months, as the economy only got worse and worse, further adding to the concept of a joint depressive state having hit the international community of the heavily industrialized West and other parts of the world as well, affecting people both high and low, of all creeds and castes. As mentioned above, there is some debate as to the actual length of the Great Depression – most people agree on 1939 as its finishing point, while others choose to include the society and economy during the American war effort, seeing the direct consequences of World War II as its natural extension – but for the time being we will focus on the 1930s alone, and leave wartime and post-wartime America for the next chapter. Let us first of all return to the very beginning. The reasons behind the economic recession have been debated over and over again, but are formally considered to be uncertain. Many aspects have been included, most of which are also recognizable in today's society, such as a dangerously disproportionate disequilibrium between the standing debt of the people (cf. a long decade of consumerist culture) and the willingness of the banks to continually give out too huge and too confident loans to people not able to pay them back any time in the

near future. It was probably very similar to the situation we experienced in 2008. Some believe another contribution to the problem was the steady rise of people leaving the farmlands for the bigger cities. As mentioned before, the industry slowly took over and left the agricultural society – a tendency shown all over the world and the beginning of the 20th century and earlier even, in Denmark as well – while a lot of money and funds were still engaged in the farms and the fields. This created yet another disproportional situation, further flushing the American economy down the drain.

The decade that followed the Wall Street crash of 1929 was characterized by many of the common factors that you generally see during long periods of economic recession. For example, the rate of unemployment was higher than any time before in the living memory of most men and women at the time. Americans by the thousands lost their jobs, and finding a new one in the crumbling industry and failing labour market was next to impossible for most. Therefore, poverty ensued – sometimes in the most extreme sense of the word – and the businesses on which the American economy was primarily based failed even more as they had to adjust their prices to accommodate the poor population so they could survive themselves. For many, it was a spiral going ever downward – and rapidly at that. Another factor was the steady deflation of the US dollar and other important contemporary currencies worldwide (the mental picture of the German bringing an entire wheelbarrow full of Deutsche Mark with him to buy bread for his family, the value of a single banknote being as low as it was, is a well-known trope for most). The political landscape of the United States was similarly shaped by the difficult economic situation. In the presidential election of 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt broke the three consecutive terms of Republican rule – Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, respectively – and the following year he formed the first Democratic government in twelve years. The president who won a record-breaking four elections in a row, Roosevelt quickly introduced his so-called New Deal programs meant as an answer to the harsh terms of the Great Depression. The New Deal consisted of what have come to be known as Roosevelt's three Rs, focussing on the ideals of relief, recovery, and reform. It arrived just at the right time – in the early weeks of

1933 the economy had hit the Depression's absolute lowest point – and Roosevelt's politics seemed to show results (Kyvig, 2002: 195-200, 206-209). In the first couple of years of his presidential term the economy actually began to turn for the better and in 1936 things almost seemed normal, by the standards of the late 1920s, that is, but the following year yet another recession abruptly struck, and unemployment rates – one of the only factors that had not improved yet – suffered once more. This recession lasted until 1939, after which the Great Depression formally ended around the same time as the beginning of World War II – although some of the economic ailments lasted for years to come, during the hardships of the war (Ibid.: 178-182, 188-193).

While the Great Depression was the time when the concept of the 'American Dream' was first formally put to words, popularized by the historian James Truslow Adams in the book *Epic of America* from 1931, the very idea suffered greatly in these years. An essential part of the American Dream is the idea of people travelling – immigrating – to the United States to pursue happiness and make one's fortune. Although a lot of internal migration took place during the Great Depression, people seeking opportunities elsewhere in the country, many out west, it was also the first period in American history when it actively experienced large-scale emigration. Many people left the United States to find work in other economies that had not been hit as hard by the depression as their own, and others – immigrants who had arrived earlier in the century – returned to their native countries seeing as their American ventures did not pan out.

It is a very complicated task to discuss the Great Depression in the perspective of cultural history. Historical theory has experienced a rapid development throughout the 20th and 21st century, especially following World War II up until today, and many new academic disciplines within the field have been invented. One of these is cultural history – the primary historical scope of this project. Cultural history has been developed as one of more innovative alternatives, opposites really, to the classic political history. It represents a new way of thinking and reconstructing the history of mankind, not only focussing on who was king at what point in time, or which war had been fought on this and that date, but



rather on the whole spectrum of human beings, including all classes and social and economical layers of civilization, as well as the cultural streams and movements they were part of. Cultural history looks into what makes people tick, so to speak. The Great Depression, however, is one of those topics that has primarily – if not practically only – been analyzed from the point of view of political history, economics being such a crucial driving force of the period<sup>4</sup>, which can also clearly be seen in the brief exposition above. Only a few historians have touched upon some of the strictly cultural aspects and consequences of the Great Depression, and those who have done so only slightly. A way of looking into the culture of the Great Depression would be to examine the lives and times of some of the people who actually experienced the period, and the products they might have left behind. The literary angle is usually very helpful. Though he did not write anything specifically concerned with the Depression<sup>5</sup>, F. Scott Fitzgerald is himself a very interesting character. These years coincide with some of the grimmest times in Fitzgerald's life, including his struggles with writing, finding and retaining steady work, economy, alcohol, his own declining health, and his mentally ill wife, Zelda, who was institutionalized on more than one occasion (Batchelor, 2014: 33-36). An example of an author who is famously remembered for his depictions of the tolls and hardships of the economic recession is John Steinbeck (1902-1968), whose *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) would become modern literary classics.

Though, one cultural trait of the Great Depression very important to mention in this context – also because of its similar importance regarding the field of economics – is the all-pervading pessimism that truly held the period in its clutches. Where the Roaring Twenties for many had been a time of parties, seemingly endless spending-sprees, and general economic liberal- and broad-mindedness – the sky is the only limit, as the saying goes – the 1930s were culturally defined by people who looked to the future, not merely lacking hope, but actually believing that any and all of their endeavors would eventually fail. It is

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4 Economy, or economic history, is usually considered a subcategory of political history.

5 Nine years after *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald published the novel *Tender Is The Night* in 1934 – during the Great Depression. The novel deals with mental illness and mirrors the relationship Fitzgerald had with his schizophrenic wife, Zelda. He is said to have considered it his own masterpiece. A final unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*, was published posthumously in 1941.

very characteristic of longer periods of recession. When first the so-called economic pessimism hits, people almost immediately stop following the classic liberalist advice that you have to *spend* money to *earn* money, and keep what little they may have left close to their person. People take no chances, run no risks, and while the more carefree economic nature of some men and women might not have been able to turn the tables around, this collectively pessimistic mind of the general public entails a grim tendency of dragging all of society even further down into the black hole of economic failure during crises like the Great Depression. This is similarly a very important factor to consider when concerned with just how, when, and why a novel like *The Great Gatsby* became popular with and relevant to the American people (Kyvig, 2002:191-193).

### **5.3 World War II**

The last section in this chapter of the project is concerned with the cultural and societal periods during and otherwise surrounding World War II, the same time in which the novel grew in popularity and started rising to eventually become the literary phenomenon we acknowledge today. Just as with the period that came before, the Great Depression, it is very important to keep in mind that this is not meant as a recounting of US military action and activities in the 1940s – which would be the perspective of traditional political history – but rather a look into the culture of the period, that is, the cultural movements and developments that became prevalent in wartime America. Once again, the focus will primarily be on the American people and – when possible – their relationship with such concepts as money, materialism, spending, dreams and hopes, and the likes.

As the Great Depression drew to a close by 1939, the war broke out in Europe. Some of the tolls that had defined the long period of economic recession continued for quite some time, but the main reason scholars call the beginning of the war the end of the Depression is that one of the biggest problems of any recession, the low and steadily dropping rates of employment, again rose tremendously in the United States during the first years of the war and turned the whole economy around for the better, especially for the common people,

and especially when the war eventually came to an end. The United States did not immediately join the effort when Great Britain and France declared Germany war following its invasion of Poland, but rather sustained neutrality for more than two years while supporting the active allied forces with material. However, this meant incessantly strained relations with the axis powers, such as economic sanctions on Japan, which were commonly perceived as direct provocations. It was not until December 7, 1941, when the Japanese air force completed a so-called preventive surprise attack on the US Pacific Fleet stationed at the naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii Territory, that the United States officially entered the war. This, among other strategic strikes and certain significant decisions on both sides of the war, eventually turned the tide for the allied forces and led to their final victory in 1945. This developed an important part of modern American culture: the pervasive self-image as the saviour of the world at a time when it was faced with the greatest conflict of all time.

In many ways, the years of war changed the population of the United States. One of the biggest and most period-defining changes was that – unlike before, during the disarray caused by the economic problems of the Great Depression – it was no longer every man for himself (Polenberg, 1980: 131-140). On the American home front it became a key issue for the people to stand together, firm and strong, in opposition of the ominous enemy far away, on distant shores. This was similarly mirrored in a lot of the all-pervading propaganda of the period. Even though many of the troubles and hardships carried over, if not directly from the recession years, Americans in general were back on the job market and had a mind to collectively struggle through until the end. The ideology was that everyone had a role to play, shoes to fill, and did their patriotic duty. Although it might not always have been the reality, people believed that they were all lifting the burden together. Everything in society was saturated with the concept of wartime (Ibid.: 147-148). And the Americans endured, they believed, because they had been through it all before. The Great Depression played a huge role in how Americans defined their own existence in the 1940s. When the war came, and with it all the stifling rations on practically everything from fuel to

food and clothes, Americans had tried it before – actually, many did not remember trying anything else at all. The people who had lived through the Depression, and especially those who had come of age during it (sort of the ‘Lost Generation’ of the Great Depression), considered themselves hardened folk who were used to such trials. The short break they got between the end of the Depression until the war actually broke out in ’41 had not been enough to spoil them. They were driven by the fact that they were all simply just pleased to be back out on the job market again, many in the industrial sector that helped fuel the American war effort. Many women – especially after the United States started sending soldiers overseas – joined their husbands at the factories, and some even took over where the men had left off. The hours were longer than usual and the wages controlled, all because of the war, but that did not matter much to the American people; first of all because they had their aforementioned beliefs, and secondly because practically all of industry suffered the pressure of the war (Blum, 1976: 105-109, 117-123). This meant that, because of the sharp rationing on many materials, the production of such luxury items as automobiles, household appliances, and even new properties was not allowed. Most working-class Americans did not earn as much as they would have, had there not been a war, but because of the war many had more money than they could spend – simply because there was nothing to spend it on. Materialism and consumerism, as had existed fifteen-twenty years prior, during the Roaring Twenties, already were concepts long gone and almost forgotten to the American public, and they were not reborn until after the war had ended in ’45, when people – who had typically saved up a lot of money – could leave the overly long shifts at the factories behind, enjoy some spare time and vacation, and start spending some of their hard-earned cash in an economy that offered them something to spend it on (Ibid.: 90-91, 92-104).

## 6. Dualistic Theoretical Approach - Internal and External Perspective

The entire theoretical perspective in this paper is based on a dualistic approach. Firstly, an internal perspective, which has a theoretical understanding of the individual that is based on the “inside” of each individual. Secondly, an external perspective that understands the individual based on external aspects, on the “outside”. More specifically, the first theoretical approach understands the individual based on psychological theory. This means that the understanding is based on the “inside” of the individuals, whereas the second theoretical approach is understanding the individual based on a Marxist understanding, which means that this understanding is based on the “outside” of the individual.

### 6.1 Internal Perspective. Psychological Theory

The overall aim of this internal perspective is to provide a psychological understanding to the analysis of *The Great Gatsby*. The psychological understanding has two overall chapters:

1) 6.1.1 Materialism and the Individual - is mainly based on Tim Kasser’s book, *High price of materialism*, which is written in 2002. So, the aim is to provide a broad understanding of how materialism affects the individuals in society. This theme is incorporated into this paper in order to understand the plot and the characters in *The Great Gatsby* in a more fulfilling way. Simultaneously, the understanding of materialism and the individual also provides a comprehension to the contemporary culture of the Roaring Twenties. This means that an understanding of how materialism influences the individuals is relevant to the understanding of characters and culture of *The Great Gatsby*.

2) 6.1.2 Maslow’s Theory of Human Needs - includes a detailed understanding of Maslow’s theory of human needs, which is arranged according to a hierarchy of prepotency. This theory specifies that the individual’s needs are always relative to the current situation of the individual. However, why is that relevant to the analysis and

understanding of *The Great Gatsby*? Fundamentally, Maslow's theory defines that the understanding of the given individual should be understood based on their current situation. Accordingly, an understanding and analysis of characters in *The Great Gatsby* should also be understood based on their current situation. For example, if a character has covered the four most basic needs, then the actual need for the character could be the need for self-actualization. So, the understanding of Maslow's theory of human needs provides a theoretical understanding of the characters in *The Great Gatsby*, and this understanding is based on the "inside" of the individual.

### **6.1.1. Materialism and the individual**

Kasser (2002) clearly concludes, based on existing scientific research, that people tend to have a decreased personal well-being if they are deeply focused on materialistic values. Following this, the central questions are: How does materialism decrease the personal well-being for the individual, and why does materialism tend to decrease the personal well-being?

Initially, it is important to somehow understand the concept of how materialism influences the personal well-being of an individual. Kasser (2002) argues that among psychologist there is a general believe that reaching your objective is increasing the self-esteem of an individual. However, this is not identical for people who are exceptionally focused on materialistic goals and who reach their materialistic objective (Kasser, 2002:48). It is though questionable if this understanding is relevant for all countries in the world. However, Kasser is focusing on an American context. So, this understanding could possibly not be relevant and adaptable to third world countries, where the situation can be estimated to be very different in a perspective of the wealth and resources in the society.

From an American context, it is defined by Kasser (2002), that people who are exceptionally focused on materialistic goals have a tendency to have a low self-esteem, and that their worth is depending on materialistic achievements and the praise of others. This means that their feeling of self-esteem is regularly exposed. Moreover, people who

are particularly focused on materialistic values are placed in a situation in which there is a discrepancy between their current situation and where they ultimately wish to be (Kasser, 2002:48). It is defined by Kasser (2002) that; "Such chronic gaps between ideals and actual situations can lead to less positive feelings about oneself, and thus less happiness" (Kasser, 2002:48). So, individuals are often feeling less positive about themselves if they are particularly focused on materialistic values, because of this chronic gap between how they wish it would be and how the situation actually is. Following this, it is important to consider that the individual's wish is relative to their current situation, as further described in Maslow's theories. So, an individual's satisfaction and philosophy of the future is dependent and relative to the individual's current situation. This means that Utopia for a poor man, who does not have enough money for food every day, is different than for a rich man (Kasser, 2002:28). As Kasser (2002) describes, based on Abraham Maslow's theories:

"For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more" (Kasser, 2002:28)

This tendency, that an individual's Utopia is relative to the current situation, is also a tendency which is corresponding to materialism. Following this, a person who is focused on materialistic goals will always base their dreams on their current situation. Kasser (2002) based this specific augmentation on Abraham Maslow's theories.

Maslow argues, in *Psychological Review* 50 1943, that humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs. This means that a person who has enough food will not be motivated by this need anymore. What happens, therefore, when more basic needs are satisfied? Maslow argues that new and "higher" needs emerge. When those needs are satisfied, then new and "higher" still needs emerge. Consequently, the needs are placed in a hierarchy, where some needs are defined as higher than others (Maslow, 1943:323-324)

Maslow (1943) defines five needs. These are as follows: “physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization” (Maslow, 1943:330). It is essential to recognize that they are arranged according to a hierarchy of prepotency. This means that the physiological needs are defined as the most basic needs, and then following in a hierarchy towards self-actualization (Maslow, 1943:330). Maslow (1943) moreover argues that a person who lacks all the needs will most probably hunger for food more than the other needs. So, the physiological needs are the most basic need, and the most important if one lacks all the needs. This means that the needs exist mainly if needs which are placed “lower” are fulfilled. However, how does these needs relate to an understanding of materialism? Firstly, it should be comprehended that materialism contributes to needs according to the hierarchy of prepotency. For example, materialism can provide safety for a person, if that person buys an apartment. Materialism can also provide self-esteem if the person buys some specific clothes, which contribute to his or her self-esteem. It can though be questioned if buying some specific clothes actually will increase an individual's self-esteem. However, that is not the specific theme in this specific sequence, but the general conclusion in this chapter is that high dependence on materialism for creating self-esteem will decrease the self-esteem. So, materialism can affect the different needs, but it is important to recognize that the needs exist according to the individual's current situation.

It is relevant to notice that these strong materialistic values also influence relationships. Kasser (2002) describes two reasons for this tendency. He defines that materialistic values have a tendency to bleed over and become relationships, which means that the materialistic values will infect the quality of connectedness. Secondly, people with a high focus on materialistic values will often decrease their involvement in the community and also devalue intimate and close relationships (Kasser, 2002:64). It is moreover defined, by Kasser (2002), that this lack of interest for connectedness, both in the local community and close relationships, leads towards these three tendencies: Firstly, a general tendency for low-quality relationships, which are characterized by insufficient generosity and empathy.



Secondly, an objectification. And thirdly, a feeling of alienation (Kasser, 2002:72)

To summarize, it has been defined in this chapter that a strong focus on materialistic values leads towards; a low self-esteem, which leads towards low self-worth. It maintains a feeling of insecurity in the individual. It creates a situation where satisfaction and happiness lay in front of an individual, if the individual gets something more, but that the individual will never reach the something that will create satisfaction. It damages the connectedness and closeness of our relationships, both in the community and the personal relationships.

The following chapter provides a more detailed understanding of each need in Maslow's theory of human needs.

### **6.1.2 Maslow's Theory of Human Needs**

Here is following a detailed description of the different needs in Maslow's theory of human needs - namely the physiological needs, the safety needs, the love needs, the esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization.

#### **6.1.2.1 Physiological Needs**

There is a focus on the physiological needs in this specific part of the chapter, based on the understanding that Maslow has defined. It is essential to comprehend that the physiological needs are placed on the lowest step in the hierarchical pyramid of human needs, which is the foundation of Maslow's theory. Following this, if an individual lacks all the needs, then that individual will most probably have the physiological needs as the major motivation. So, if the individual lacks the following needs - physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization, which are all described in the paper, then that individual will hunger more for food than any other need. An individual's consciousness is preempt to hunger, and the other human needs are therefore not relevant. This means that you can define the other needs as simply non-

existent, in this situation (Maslow, 1943:322)

However, does the past influence the individual's ability to tolerate a deprivation of a need in the future? It is argued, by Maslow (1943), that: "it is precisely those individuals in whom a certain need has always been satisfied who are best equipped to tolerate deprivation of that need in the future" (Maslow, 1943:324). He continues by describing that the reaction of individuals who have been underprivileged in the past will be different than the reaction of the individuals who have never been underprivileged in the same way. This means that the past of a given person is important to the way they will react to the current and future situation (Maslow, 1943:324).

The argumentation by Maslow (1943) - that those individuals, in whom a certain need has always been satisfied, are best equipped to tolerate deprivation of that need in the future - can possibly develop a wonder for the reader. This is due to the fact that it could be logically argued that an individual who has coped with a lack of a need in past would be better at tolerating the lack of that need in the future - because of his experience with lacking that need. Nonetheless, Maslow's conclusion is opposite to the conclusion of this argumentation, and Maslow's theory is a central theory and understanding in this paper.

When the physiological needs are satisfied, other and "higher" needs emerge. These needs are described and defined in the following chapters, starting with the safety needs (Maslow, 1943:322).

### **6.1.2.2 The Safety Needs**

In a situation in which the physiological needs are approximately gratified, a new kind of needs will emerge, those are categorized by Maslow as the safety needs. The description of the physiological needs are relatively similar to the safety needs, in terms of their importance to the human organism. The organism may equivalently be dominated by the security needs and the physiological needs. Maslow defines the whole organism as a safety-seeking mechanism, which indicates how important the safety needs are. Following this, the current world-outlook for an individual is, as in the case of the hungry man,

dependent on the current situation. So, if an individual is experiencing situations of little safety, then essentially everything is less important than safety (Maslow, 1943:324)

It is defined, by Maslow (1943), that the healthy and normal adult is generally satisfied in his or her safety needs. This means that the safety needs can be seen as a significant prerequisite for being a healthy and normal individual in society. Following this, Maslow has this description of the “good” and peaceful society, based on the safety needs: “The peaceful, smoothly running, “good” society ordinarily makes its members feel safe enough from wild animals, extremes of temperature, criminals, assault and murder, tyranny etc.” (Maslow, 1943:325). So, the individuals no longer have the safety needs in this society. This means that the safe individual no longer will feel endangered, in the same way as the sated individual no longer will feel hungry (Maslow, 1943:325).

### **6.1.2.3 The Love Needs**

The love needs will emerge if both the physiological and the safety needs are relatively well fulfilled. The love needs can be more detailedly be described as “the love and affection and belongingness needs” (Maslow, 1943:326). So, if the physiological and safety needs are fulfilled the individual will feel strongly about absence of love relationships. This means that the individual will not feel as strongly about the absence of these love relationships, if the physiological and safety needs are not fulfilled.

Maslow (1943) has this description of the individual with relatively well fulfilled physiological and safety needs:

“He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely, for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve this goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world and may even forget than once, when he was hungry, he sneered at love” (Maslow, 1943:326)

So, the individual's needs are relative to their current situation. This means that the individual may actually forget that he was hungry, and how he “sneered at love” back then.

#### 6.1.2.4 The Esteem Needs

People in society have a need for self-esteem and self-respect. This need is placed “higher” than the previous three needs, in the previously described hierarchy of needs. The need for self-esteem can be categorized into two different sets. Firstly, the need for recognition, attention, importance, reputation, appreciation and prestige. And, secondly, a desire for achievement, for confidence, for adequacy, and for freedom and independence (Maslow, 1943:326).

Everyone in society has a general need for a good evaluation of themselves, which is closely related to their self-esteem and self-respect, and also for the esteem of other people in society. Maslow (1943) describes that this satisfaction of the self-esteem needs leads to: “feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capacity and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world” (Maslow, 1943:327). However, if these self-esteem needs are not fulfilled, then it will produce a feeling of helplessness, weakness, and inferiority for the individual (Maslow, 1943:327)

To summarize, it can clearly be observed how essential the need for self-esteem is. This is because a good self-esteem will lead toward feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capacity and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world, whereas lacking self-esteem will lead towards feelings of helplessness, weakness and inferiority for the individual.

However, to argue that the need of self-esteem is an independent need, which is not influenced by the love needs, should not be seen as adequate. So, the self-esteem of a given individual is influenced by the love relationships of the individual. Correspondingly, the self-esteem needs are placed higher than the love-needs in the hierarchical pyramid of human needs. So, the love needs should be seen as a precondition for the self-esteem needs. However, it can be argued that the esteem need also exist, before the love needs are totally gratified. So, these two needs, the love needs and esteem needs, should be understood as two needs that influence each other, and as two needs that both, to some

extend, emerge after the physiological and safety needs are gratified.

#### **6.1.2.5 The Need for Self-actualization**

The need for self-actualization is related to what the individual is fitted for. This means that a poet must write, a musician must make music, and an artist must paint, if he or she is to be ultimately fulfilled and happy. So, if all the four previous described needs are fulfilled then a new need will emerge (Maslow, 1943: 327). As Maslow (1943) further explains: "The clear emergence of these needs rests upon prior satisfaction of the physiological, safety, love and esteem needs. We shall call people who are satisfied in these needs, basically satisfied people" (Maslow, 1943: 327). So, individuals who are satisfied in the first four needs are defined as basically satisfied people. Accordingly, here is provided a detailed description of individuals who are gratified in their basic needs:

"This is to say that they have a feeling of belongingness and rootedness, they are satisfied in their love needs, have friends and feel loved and lovable, they have status and place in life and respect from other people, and they have a reasonable feeling of worth and self-respect" (Maslow, 1971: 299).

So, this provides a detailed description of an individual who has covered the basic needs, and that individual is now focused on the highest need in the pyramid - namely self-actualization. It is also interesting to focus on the previous description of the individual, who has covered the basic needs, from a perspective of pathology. Pathology should in this case be understood as an understanding of the consequences of not having the needs covered. For example, if the safety needs are not covered then the consequence, in terms of pathology, is a feeling of insecurity. So, the same self-actualizing individuals, who are described previously, can be understood based on pathology - this means that self-actualizing people do not:

"Feel anxiety ridden, insecure, unsafe, do not feel alone, ostracized, rootless, or

isolated, for not feel unloveable, rejected, or unwanted, do not feel despised and looked down upon, and do not feel deeply unworthy, nor do they have crippling feelings of inferiority or worthlessness” (Maslow, 1971: 299)

So, the basic needs of the individuals can be understood both from an understanding of the needs and from an understanding of how they feel if their needs are not gratified.

Additionally, self-actualizing people are involved in something outside themselves - “without one single exception” (Maslow,1971:43). This means that self-actualization is related to something outside the individual's own skin. Following this, Maslow (1971) defines that self-actualizing people devote their lives to “being values”. There are fifteen “being values”, and it is clear that understanding self-actualization is based on a detailed understanding of the “being values”. Moreover, Maslow (1971) defines that these “being values” behave like needs, and he defines them as metaneeds. Accordingly, the structure and understanding of self-actualization is based on the metaneeds - which should be understood based on the “being values”. The following table illustrates the fifteen different “being values”. However, prior to the table is provided an explanation and description of the following terms in the table: pathogenic deprivation and specific metapathologies:

*pathogenic deprivation* should in the table be understood as an opposition to the B-value. For example, if Truth (B-value 1) is not fulfilled then it will generate dishonesty, which will lead towards feelings of disbelief, mistrust, cynicism, skepticism, and suspicion.

*specific metapathologies* describes the feelings, emotions and thoughts of the individual if the pathogenic deprivation is experienced, which means that the specific B-value is not fulfilled. So, if Justice (B-value 9) is not gratified then the individual will experience injustice, which will generate these feelings, emotions and thoughts for the individual; insecurity, anger, cynicism, mistrust, lawlessness, jungle world-view, total selfishness.

## B-values and Specific Metapathologies:

B - values	Pathogenic Deprivation	Specific Metapathologies
1. Truth	Dishonesty	Disbelief; mistrust; cynicism, skepticism; suspicion.
2. Goodness	Evilness	Utter selfishness. hatred; repulsion; disgust. Reliance only upon self and for self. Nihilism. Cynicism
3. Beauty	Ugliness	Vulgarity. Specific unhappiness, restlessness, loss of taste, tension, fatigue. Philistinism. Bleakness
4. Unity, Wholeness	Chaos, Atomism, loss of connectedness	Disintegration; "the world is falling apart." Arbitrariness.
4a. Dichotomy - Transcendence	Black and white dichotomies. Loss of gradations, of degree. Forced polarization. Forced choices	Black-white thinking, either / or thinking. Seeing everything as a duel or a war, or a conflict. Low synergy. Simplistic view of life
5. Aliveness; Process	Deadness. Mechanizing of life	Deadness. Robotizing. Feeling oneself to be totally determined. Loss of emotion. Boredom; loss of zest in life. Experiential emptiness
6. Uniqueness	Sameness; uniformity; interchangeability	Loss of feeling of self and of individuality. Feeling oneself to be interchangeable, anonymous, not really needed
7. Perfection	Imperfection; sloppiness; poor workmanship, shoddiness	Discouragement; hopelessness; nothing to work for
7a. Necessity	Accident; occasionalism; inconsistency	Chaos; unpredictability. Loss of safety. Vigilance
8. Completion; finality	Incompleteness	Feelings of incompleteness with perseveration. Hopelessness. Cessation of striving and coping. No use trying
9. Justice	Injustice	Insecurity; anger; cynicism; mistrust; lawlessness; jungle world-view; total selfishness
9a. Order	Lawlessness. Breakdown of authority	Insecurity. Wariness. Loss of safety, of predictability. Necessity for vigilance, alertness, tension, being on guard
10. Simplicity	Confusing complexity. Disconnectedness. Disintegration	Overcomplexity; confusion; bewilderment, conflict, loss of orientation
11. Richness, totality, comprehensiveness	Poverty. Coarctation.	Depression; uneasiness; loss of interest in world
12. Effortlessness	Effortfulness	Fatigue, strain, striving, clumsiness,

13. Playfulness	Humorlessness	awkwardness, gracelessness, stiffness
		Grimness; depression; paranoid humorlessness; loss of zest in life. Cheerlessness. Loss of ability to enjoy
14. Selfsufficiency	Contingency; Accident; Occasionalism	Dependence upon the perceiver. It becomes his responsibility
15. Meaningfulness	Meaninglessness	Meaninglessness. Despair. Senselessness of life

(Maslow, 1971:318-319)

If one looks detailedly on the table, then it can be observed how the absence of these B-values or metaneeds actually can affect other needs than self-actualization. For example, if one is not experiencing justice (B value 9) then it will generate a feeling of insecurity, which will influence the safety needs of that individual. Following this, it can be concluded that these B-values or Metaneeds emerge when an individual has the need of self-actualization. However, it can also be concluded that an absence of some B-values or metaneeds can affect other needs, such as the safety need, self-esteem needs and love needs.

This can though put into question how the B-values or metaneeds actually should be understood. Maslow (1971) has this further description of the B-values:

“One devotes his life to the law, another to justice, another to beauty or truth. All, in one way or another, devote their lives to the search for what I have called the “being” values (“B” for short), the ultimate values which are intrinsic, which cannot be reduced to anything more ultimate“ (Maslow, 1971:43)

So, the B-values should be understood as the values that self-actualizing people search for in order to become self-actualized. In this way, it is important to understand B-values as being related to becoming self-actualized. But, at the same time, it is also important to understand that experiencing the Pathogenic Deprivation of a B-value can affect other “lower” needs on Maslow's hierarchical pyramid of needs.



## **6.2. External Perspective. Marxist Perspective and the American Dream**

This chapter has a focus on Marxist criticism and on the American Dream. Both these have an external focus, which means that both understand the individuals in society based on external factors.

Throughout this chapter is described and explained different aspects about Marxist criticism and the American Dream. A focus in the chapter is on how socioeconomic classes are created, what influence those classes have on society and the individuals in society. This is all based on a Marxist perspective. Moreover, this chapter also includes an understanding on how ideologies, mainly capitalist ideologies, such as the capitalist ideology itself and the American Dream, influence the establishment of socioeconomic classes and the culture of the society.

The focus is thereafter specifically on the American dream. This is due to the fact that the American Dream, from a Marxist perspective, influences and blinds the American population. It blinds the American population in a way that is very important to the understanding of the socioeconomic classes in American society (Lois, 2006:58).

Another important element to consider is the fact that the popularity and the meaning of the American dream has changed in American history. It is, therefore, not adequate to provide an understanding that is not considering the historical factors. Following this, the aim is to provide a Marxist based understanding of the historical periods that are relevant to the content of the *Great Gatsby*. So, how did the popularity and view on the American dream change in these periods?

To summarize, this entire theoretical chapter has an external understanding of the individual, which is based on a Marxist perspective and an understanding of the American Dream. Ultimately, this understanding is used to analyse and understand characters of *The Great Gatsby*.

### **6.2.1 Marxist Understanding**

What does it mean to understand society from a Marxist perspective? How does it differ

from other approaches, which are more focused on the individual of the society? Firstly, it is essential to understand that Marxist theory is based on that the economic system is the most important force in human societies. Following this, a Marxist approach does not take a starting point in the psyche of the individual, from a perspective where the individual is seen as independent and therefore not controlled by the economic system of the society. Marxist theory, instead, focuses on the economic realities of human culture. Because, if a theory does not focus on the economic realities, then that theory misunderstands human culture (Lois, 2006:53)

Lois (2006) explains that, for Marxism, the motive for all political and social activities in society is to keep and to get economic power. He, moreover, explains that economics is the foundation for the establishment of political, social, and ideological realities in society. Social and political power is, therefore, also closely related to economic power. So, Marxist theory today talks about the class structure with the concept of socioeconomic class, instead of focusing solely on economic class (Lois, 2006:54).

#### **6.2.1.1 Socioeconomic Class**

How significant is the division of people into socioeconomic classes, compared to other aspects, such as ethnicity, gender, race, religion etc.? Some theories may have a relative equilibrium in significance between the different aspects. However, for Marxist theory, the division of socioeconomic classes is the most significant aspect. This means that the real conflict in society is between the different socioeconomic classes. So, generally, the real conflict is between the “haves”, who are defined as the bourgeoisie, and the “have-nots”, who are defined as the proletariat. The bourgeoisie is categorized as the people who control the economic, human, and natural resources of the world. Contradictory to this group is the proletariat (Lois, 2006:54). This group covers the majority of the global population, and is described with these words: “who live in substandard conditions and who have always performed the manual labor - the mining, the factory work, the ditch digging, the railroad building - that fills the coffers of the rich” (Lois, 2006:54).

### 6.2.1.2 Socioeconomic Classes in America

This part chapter is in the paper in order to get a specific understanding of the socioeconomic classes in America. *The Great Gatsby* takes place in American society in 1920s, so a specific understanding of the socioeconomic classes in America is therefore relevant to the analysis of *The Great Gatsby*.

Firstly, more than two categorizations are needed in order to get a detailed comprehension of the different classes in American society. This is due to the fact that it is challenging to clearly place people in either the proletariat or the bourgeoisie in American society. The central point, argued by Lois (2006), is that the economic system of America has become so complex that two categories will not cover the socioeconomic classes. For example, how do you classify a person who has a company with several employees, if the yearly profit of the company owner is less than the salary for an employee in a big corporation. So, should the company owner be categorized as bourgeoisie, since he has human resources. Or should the employee in a big corporation be categorized as bourgeoisie because of his relative high economic resources. This example shows the complexity in modern capitalistic societies, including American society (Lois, 2006:55).

Lois (2006) proposes that it would be useful to classify the socioeconomic classes in America according to socioeconomic lifestyle, instead of focusing on the owner/ worker difference. This means that the focus should be specifically on income, without focusing on how the income is acquired. However, Lois (2006) refers to “this point in history” in his book, which means that the specific focus can be estimated to be contemporary American society. It would, though, be logical that this reference is somehow relevant to American society in the 1920s as well. This is due to the fact that both American society in the 1920s and contemporary American society is based on capitalism (Lois, 2006:55)

Lois (2006) divides the American society into these five socioeconomic classes: “underclass, lower class, middle class, upper class, and “aristocracy” (Lois, 2006:55). This division is based on the socioeconomic lifestyle of the different groups.

### 6.2.1.3 Understanding Ideology

This part chapter is about the role of ideology in society. From a Marxist perspective, it is essential to understand the role of ideology. This is because ideology is seen as a system of beliefs that influence the way the individuals in the society see the world (Lois, 2006:55). The role of ideology is therefore, from a Marxist perspective, to influence the way the population understand the world in order to maintain power (Lois, 2006:59). This means that repressive ideologies establish a way of looking at society from where realities are only understood based on the ideology. Marxism argues that understanding the world based on these repressive ideologies blinds the individuals to the fact that the ideologies justify the ruling system of society. This means that the repressive ideologies keep the population submissive to the ruling system of society (Lois, 2006:57)

This chapter will focus on two specific capitalistic ideologies, namely capitalism itself and the American Dream. This is because this paper will focus on American society, and that American society is greatly based on these capitalist ideologies. Fundamentally, it is important to understand that capitalism is based on that everything can be owned. This is opposite to, for example, different Native American nations. Those nations believe that land is not something which can be owned. Contradictory to this is the capitalist ideology. As Lois (2006) explains:

““Every family wants to own its own home on its own land” is a capitalist ideology that sells itself as natural by pointing, for example, to the fact that almost all Americans want to own their own property, without acknowledging that this desire is created in us by the capitalist culture in which we live” (Lois, 2006:55)

So, a central story in capitalist ideology is that it is natural that every family want to own their own piece of land. Focusing on American society, it can also be seen how the middle

class generally resent the poor. This is because that a relative high amount of tax money from the middle class goes to governmental programs that help the poor. Nonetheless, the middle class do not realize these two significant socioeconomic realities, according to Lois (2006): Firstly, that it is the high socioeconomic classes that decide the details about the tax system, and that is it also the high socioeconomic classes that decide how to spend the tax money. So, the middle class supports the poor because of the wealthy socioeconomic classes. Secondly, that the poor actually receives a fraction of the funds that is allocated to them (Lois, 2006:57). This all illustrates how the middle class in American society is blinded by the American Dream. They are blinded by the American dream because it explains to them that financial success is only a product of hard work, and that everyone has an equal chance to be financially successful. The next part of this chapter will focus specifically on the American Dream (Lois, 2006:57).

### **6.2.2 The American Dream**

After all, what is the American Dream? Is it only an innocent story, or is it very influential to American culture and society? For Marxism, the American Dream is defined as being an ideology. It is seen as a subjective belief system, which is used to see the world. This means that it is not a natural or innate way of seeing the world. Lois (2006) defines that this ideology, the American Dream, blinds the population of America. It blinds them from the failures in the past and the contemporary failures of the ideology (Lois, 2006:58). Lois (2006) enlists these following failures of the American Dream:

“the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the virtual enslavement of indentured servants, the abuses suffered by immigrant populations, the widening economic gulf between America's rich and poor, the growing ranks of the homeless and hungry, the enduring socioeconomic barriers against women and people of color, and the like” (Lois, 2006:58).

So, from a Marxist perspective, the ideology of the American Dream has many failures,

both in past and contemporary society. It is clear from the previous that the American Dream is influential to the establishment of socioeconomic classes in American society. So, the story of the American Dream is widening the gulf between the rich and poor. While, at the same time, it justifies this widening based on the ideology. So, the central story in the American Dream is that everyone has the possibility to become economically successful, and that it is your own mistake if you do not become so. It is seen as being natural to want to “get ahead”, to advance in the socioeconomic classes. However, the success of the American Dream, which is based on wanting to “get ahead”, creates a situation in which the very wealthy lifestyle of a few is based on the economic difficulties of the many. But, the power of the ideology is that it establishes a belief in the fairness and naturalness of the socioeconomic system in America. So, the ideology supports the unequal socioeconomic system of a capitalist country, such as America - countries where the human, financial and natural resources are owned, and where those owners come to be the dominant classes (Lois, 2006:58).

However, there are also seemingly positive interpretations of the American Dream. The American historian, James Truslow Adams, is credited for using the phrase for the first time in 1931. Adams worked with the following description of the American Dream:

“The dream is a vision of a better, deeper, richer life for every individual, regardless of the position in society which he or she may occupy by the accident of birth. It has been a dream of a chance to rise in the economic scale, but quite as much, or more than that, of a chance to develop our capacities to the full, unhampered by unjust restrictions of caste or custom.” (Samuel, 2012:13)

An essential part of the American Dream, if one follows Adams’ descriptions, is that the dream provides a possibility for everyone to increase in their socioeconomic class. So, this definition is rather contradicting to the suppressing image of the American Dream that a Marxist perspective provides.

Why do the American Dream enlist a high amount of support from all Americans, if it creates a situation in which the very wealthy lifestyle of a few is based on the economic difficulties of the many? It is important to understand how the American Dream is interpreted in the American population in order to answer this question. The American Dream is generally not seen as an oppressive ideology. Rather the opposite, it is seen as an ideology or myth that gives every individual freedom and opportunity. The American Dream also argues that the high economic classes deserve their wealth. Following this, Lois (2006) argues that the American Dream serves as justification for the high socioeconomic classes. The high socioeconomic classes use this justification in order to avoid feeling guilty that they have acquired a large fortune, when many of their fellow citizens barely can make a living (Lois, 2006:58). However, why does the American Dream enlist support among those who do not achieve it? Part of the reason is that the American Dream includes that everyone has the possibility to win. So, it is equivalent to the big lotteries, where everyone has the possibility to win. Lois (2006) argues that people cling to this possibility, and that: “the less financial security we have, the more we need something to hope for (Lois, 2006:58). This indicates that a limited financial security will provide a higher need for something to hope for. This higher need for hope is also part of why the American Dream grew stronger during the Great Depression. This is all described in more detail later on.

The fact that the popularity of the American dream and the image of the American dream itself has changed in American history raises another important question: What is the origin of the American Dream and how has it changed in American history?

### **6.2.2.1 The American Dream from a Historical Perspective**

This chapter has a specific focus on the American Dream, from a historical perspective. It is significant, according to Samuel (2012), to understand that the American Dream has not been unchanging in American history. Rather contradictory, it has been a rollercoaster ride, with both twist and turns and ups and downs (Samuel, 2012:4). Accordingly, it is relevant

to base the understanding of the American dream on the specific historical periods. This means, that the understanding of the American Dream in the Roaring Twenties is not necessarily the same as the understanding of the American dream during the Great Depression. These two historical periods in American history, namely the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, are the main historical periods in this paper, together with World War II . Accordingly, the main aim of this chapter is to include a historical comprehension of the American Dream. Including a comprehension of these questions: What is the origin of the American Dream? And, how did the American Dream change through American history, primarily with a focus on the Roaring Twenties towards the Great Depression.

The origin of the phrase “the American Dream” can be traced back to James Truslow Adams. Adams was a popular and populist historian, who is credited for using the phrase for the first time, when he used the phrase in 1931 (Samuel, 2012:2). The root of the phrase can, though, be traced back centuries. Some historians argue that it can be traced back to before America was a nation, and some even argue that it can be traced back to the birth of civilization. It is, though, widely acknowledged that the basic ideas of the American Dream arrived to the North American continent in the seventeenth century. Moreover, that these basic ideas was officially articulated into the country a century later, with the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. (Samuel, 2012:3)

It is clear that Adams borrowed ideas from other great thinkers, when he officially coined the phrase in 1931. Samuel (2012) includes this long line of great thinkers that have inspired Adams:

“Tocqueville, Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau all addressed aspects of the Dream, notably, as did lesser-known but unquestionably brilliant minds such as James Bryce and James Muirhead. Historical figures, including Jefferson, Franklin, and Lincoln, famously espoused elements of the American Dream, while Dale Carnegie, Norman Vincent Peale, and, of course, Horatio Alger have served as some of its



loudest spokespeople” (Samuel, 2012:4)

Following this, it is clear that the American Dream existed way before the phrase was officially coined in 1931. The definition of the American dream in the beginning of the 1930s is therefore, simply, a continuation of thoughts that goes back to the origin of America, and some argue that the origin is even older.

### ***6.2.3 Conclusion. The American Dream in the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression***

The Great Depression was a period that started from around 1929. The period was started from the economic crash, which mainly started from “Black Thursday” on October the 24th in 1929. This chapter has a specific focus on the American Dream in the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, whereas the other chapters in this paper outline a detailed understanding of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression. So, following this, what influence did the Great Depression have on the American Dream? Samuel (2012) argues that the American society experienced a time of disconcerting in the 1930s, due to the Great Depression. (Samuel, 2012: 24). Nonetheless, the 1930s would actually prove to be a fruitful period if one focusses specifically on the American Dream. This means that the American Dream did not only survive the economic Depression - it grew stronger in the period. It is defined by Samuel (2012) that the American people during the Great Depression struggled with their own identity because of the political, social, and economic problems of the period. So, the American Dream functioned as an ideology and myth that affirmed the population’s faith in democracy and society in the period (Samuel, 2012: 13). Following this, it can be seen how the dream provided hope to the American population in this economically difficult period, when many people lost their job.

In the middle and end of the 1930s there were important political changes in the world, which made the American population consider their own history and the American Dream. Samuel (2012) argues that the history of the country and the American Dream became an obsession in the 1930s. Particularly, in the last years of the decade when Hitler’s rampage

throughout Europe made the future even more disconcerting and unsure (Samuel, 2012: 24). So, the Great Depression and the political events in Europe created a situation where the American population questioned themselves, and part of their answer was found in the American Dream.

According to Adams, the end of the Roaring Twenties is a period in which the American society in general had lost its way. He argues that the nation had forgotten the guiding philosophy behind the nation, which arguably is closely related to the American Dream, due to an untamed pursuit for materialism and money. This meant, according to Adams, that: "The dream of a richer, better, fuller human life for all citizens instead of for a small class had been turned by our leaders and ourselves into a statistical table of standard of living" (Samuel, 2012: 13). Adams argued that an economic depression would be the natural result of the development in the late 1920s. So, he actually predicted the market crash and depression, which was later known as the Great Depression. He summarized that the nation had survived an "mental disorder", which was created during the Roaring Twenties. Following this, he believed that the American Dream would begin to reemerge again after the Roaring Twenties (Samuel, 2012: 13).

Generally, Samuel (2012) argues that the American Dream has functioned as a source of hope for people, and particularly in hard economic times. This leaves the dream in a situation where economic struggles has and will strengthen the myth and ideology. Because it offers hope and belief in a time when it is needed (Samuel, 2012: 196).

Following this, what conclusions can be drawn considering the differences between the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, in a perspective of the American Dream?

It can be concluded that the enormous economic struggles during the Great Depression actually created a situation in which the popularity and importance of the American Dream increased. This is due to the fact that the population had an increased need for hope and that the American Dream served as a beacon of hope for them. However, it can not be concluded that the American Dream's popularity increased from day one of the Great Depression, which can be estimated to be from Black Monday 1929. It should instead be

seen as a gradual rise in popularity and importance as the years during the Great Depression went by. However, how does this all relate to the culture of America in these two periods, and how is this seen from a Marxist perspective?

#### ***6.2.4 Conclusion. Marxist perspective on the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression***

This concluding chapter includes an understanding of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression that is based on a Marxist understanding of the world and on the comprehension of the American Dream. So, based on the entire understanding of Marxism and the American Dream - how can the American culture and society in the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression be understood?

Firstly, based on a Marxist perspective, it is important to recognize that the economic system is the most important force in human societies. This means that human culture is based on the economic realities of society. Following this, the economic realities establish the socioeconomic classes of a given society. It has been concluded that the American society, during the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression, was based on the capitalistic ideology and on the American Dream, which is also defined as an ideology from a Marxist perspective. So, these ideologies serve to justify the socioeconomic classes of the American society. This means that the ideologies are essential to the establishment of socioeconomic classes and therefore also to the culture of the American society, since all human culture is ultimately based on the economic realities. However, it has also been argued in the chapters that the American Dream serves as a positive story for the American people. It can certainly be concluded, based on the chapters, that the dream served as a beacon of hope for part of the American population during the Great Depression. Nevertheless, the American Dream is also a main contributor to the widening of the gulf between rich and poor in the country. As argued before, the success of the American Dream, which is based on wanting to “get ahead”, creates a situation in which the very wealthy lifestyle of a few is based on the economic difficulties of the many.

Ultimately, how does this all relate to *The Great Gatsby*? Firstly, *The Great Gatsby* takes place in the middle of the Roaring Twenties. So, the specific understanding of this period is relevant. Secondly, from a Marxist perspective, the economic realities are essential to the understanding of human culture in the period. Following this, the actions and the decisions of the characters in the *Great Gatsby* can be seen according to the socioeconomic realities of the American society. Ultimately, the characters can be understood based on a Marxist perspective, where the socioeconomic realities of the Roaring Twenties are the most important determinant to their actions and decisions.

The comprehension of the American Dream can also serve as a perspective and understanding to the story and characters in the *Great Gatsby*. It can be concluded, based on a Marxist perspective, that the American Dream serves as an ideology in American society. It blinds the American population, and increases the gulf between rich and poor, while it justifies the increase. However, the American Dream also serves as beacon of hope - that it is possible for everyone to increase in socioeconomic classes. It did so for many people during the Great Depression. So, ultimately, the American Dream is very essential to American society and culture, and therefore also essential to a book that takes place in America in the middle of the Roaring Twenties.

Following this, the story of *The Great Gatsby* and the characters of the novel can be understood based on a Marxist perspective and based on the ideology of the American Dream.

## 7. Internal and External Analysis

### 7.1 Introduction to the Analysis

The following section of the project will focus on the analysis, and - to the best of our ability - on solving the overall problem statement. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* we first meet Nick Carraway who serves as both a character influencing the plot of the novel as well as its first-person narrator. He is not the protagonist in any traditional sense of the word and neither is the eponymous Jay Gatsby, whom we are introduced to later - Gatsby is rather the *main* character, the center of a literary solar system, with the other characters, Nick, Daisy, Tom, Jordan, the Wilsons etc., orbiting around him on different but often intertwining planetary paths. All of this is perceived through Nick's perspective, and spiced with his personal commentary in any given situation.

In the spring of 1922, Nick, who is a young and ambitious Yale graduate and World War I veteran from an affluent background in the Midwest, lands a job as a bond salesman in New York City and finds a place to stay, renting a small bungalow, in the fictitious township of West Egg, Long Island (most likely based on the real-life geographic area of Great Neck; its counterpart, "East Egg", being based on Manhasset Neck). Here he is also close to some otherwise distant family: his beautiful second cousin, once removed, Daisy Buchanan, and her husband Tom. This young couple lives in the somewhat more exclusive East Egg, across the bay, where the Old Money reside. However, Nick finds the most interesting thing in this new place to be his next-door neighbor, the mysterious Gatsby, who is famous - notorious, practically - for hosting many and more often than not extremely lavish parties in his huge mansion, accommodating the trendy young crowd of New York in the early Roaring Twenties. Nick soon befriends Gatsby and gets to know him personally, learning that he is not actually a typical playboy millionaire extraordinaire, but merely posing as such to eventually catch the attention of a long-lost love interest who happens to be non other than Nick's cousin Daisy. From then on, during the course of the summer, Nick gets involved in the game for Daisy's affection and the awkward romantic

threesome that follows, first as a simple intermediary, later as a primary witness to the affair that begins between Gatsby and Daisy. Not before long, however, Tom, Daisy's husband, smells the rat and discovers the infidelity. In a huge confrontation at the Plaza Hotel, Tom verbally assaults Gatsby, reveals that he is nothing but a criminal who owes his entire fortune to illegal bootlegging and in cahoots with the infamous gangster Meyer Wolfshiem, and convinces Daisy that he himself is the right man for her because of the history they share. In a final act of embarrassment towards Gatsby, Tom tells Daisy to drive home with Gatsby. "Go on. He won't annoy you. I think he realizes that his presumptuous little flirtation is over." Tom states (Fitzgerald, 1925: 110), in an effort to show that Gatsby is not - and never has been - a threat to him. It all ends in a complicated affair, when Daisy, who is driving, hits Myrtle Wilson with Gatsby's car in the valley of ashes. George, Myrtle's husband, suspects the culprit to be Myrtle's secret lover (who is, in fact, Tom), and from the car he deduces that that man is Jay Gatsby. In the novel's final act, George shows up at Gatsby's place and shoots the already defeated man dead in his pool.

The part of our analysis specifically concerned with the literature at hand, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), will be mainly character-oriented and character-driven, while similarly including other analytical aspects when need be. As stated above, the Gatsby character is naturally the very centerpiece of Fitzgerald's novel. Therefore, we primarily want to focus on him. We analyze Gatsby applying the different theories of psychology and the Marxist understanding, respectively, in an effort to include both relevant internal and external aspects in our new take on the Gatsby interpretation (as thoroughly explained in the project introduction above). The other characters will be included as well, Tom Buchanan, for example, in opposition to Gatsby, to chart the intricate web of details that goes into such complicated character development. Secondly, rising above the literature itself, we will turn our attention to the culture of American society in the 1920s and 30s, and apply what we have learned to try and explain the contemporary impact and influence - or lack thereof - of F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Great Gatsby*.

## **7.2 The Internal Analysis of Jay Gatsby: Maslow's Theory of Human Needs**

The overall aim of this chapter is to comprehend and analyse Jay Gatsby as a character, according to the theoretical understanding of Maslow's theory of human need, and also to the understanding of materialism, based on Kasser (2002), which are both detailedly described earlier in this paper.

Jay Gatsby grew up poor, and later got rich. Rich to an extent where everything buyable was possible. Where everything was possible to get, besides, however, Daisy. His one true love. His everything, from the day they met five years before the story takes place. Gatsby grew up poor, contradicting to the stories he told people about his life. He later then got rich from being involved in illegal distribution of alcohol, working for Meyer Wolfshiem. A roller coaster ride on Maslow's pyramid of human needs. From not being gratified on the physiological and safety needs when he grew up and during the war, because of the relative imagined absent of money and safety until he got involved in the illegal distribution of alcohol. To having the physiological and safety needs entirely covered when he later became rich.

So, this chapter looks at Gatsby from a perspective of Maslow's theory, and also from a perspective of materialism. This means that the individual should always be understood based on the current situation of the individual. Following this, the needs, and also dreams, for an individual should be comprehended based on the current situation - and based on the hierarchy of needs. This perspective is therefore based on internal aspects, contradicting to the Marxist understanding in this paper, which is based on external aspects. This means that the individual should be understood without focusing on external aspects.

### **7.2.1 The Significance of the Green Light on the Deck**

Nick Carraway, the storyteller of *The Great Gatsby* novel, observes Gatsby standing in his garden looking over the bay in the beginning of the novel. He looks over to Daisy's home on the other side of the bay. And, more detailedly, he sees a green light on the end of the

dock of the house. A green light that personifies Daisy for him. A green light of dreams and longing, that burns in his mind. One day, however, the colossal significance of the green light had changed forever. And that is the day when he meets Daisy for a cup of tea at Nick's home. On that day, when Daisy and Nick visit his place later, he stands with Daisy in his garden and looks over to the same green light. However, now, the green light is just a light on a dock, in this moment of immense happiness for Jay Gatsby.

“Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one” (Fitzgerald, 1925: 81)

How is this change significant related to Maslow's theory of human needs? This specific part of the story, where Gatsby stands with Daisy, can be seen as an example of how the human needs are always related to the current situation of the individual. However, what does the green light actually symbolize to Gatsby?

When Gatsby looks over to the other side of the bay, at the green light, while he is dreaming and longing, then he is unquestionably thinking about Daisy. Just consider Jordan's story about Gatsby, which she told to Nick:

““Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay.” Then it had not been merely the stars to which he had aspired on the June night.” (Fitzgerald, 1925:69)

So, Gatsby bought the house so that he could be close to Daisy. However, what need is it that the green light symbolizes, in a perspective of Maslow's theory? More specifically, what is it that Daisy's presence means to Gatsby? First of all, let us include a more



detailed understanding of the love need. If the previous two needs, physiological and safety needs, are gratified, then the individual will hunger for affectionate relations with people. Moreover, the individual will also strive for a place in the group. And, as specified in chapter 6.1.2.3, he will strive for these relations and his place in the group to an extent that will make him forget that once, when he was hungry, he sneered at love. With this more detailed understanding of the love needs, let us go back to when Gatsby and Daisy first met, one October day in nineteen-seventeen, which is about five years before they went to Gatsby's house in West Eggs for the first time:

“His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete.” (Fitzgerald, 1925:96)

His love for Daisy was overwhelming, all present, all important for Gatsby. It was the east, and Daisy was the sun.

Gatsby believed in the green light, which symbolized his love, every night when it shined so bright. His heart longed every time he saw it shine. He believed in “the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eludes us then, but that's not matter - tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther --- And one fine morning --” (Fitzgerald, 1925:156).

Following this, it can be argued that the green light, in the beginning, symbolizes Gatsby's love needs. His great love is just on the other side of the bay. However, the love need does no longer exist, when he is together with Daisy at his house. He is suddenly gratified in his love needs. So, the light is no longer symbolizing a burning need in Gatsby's heart.

To conclude, the love need do no longer exist for Jay Gatsby, and the green light, that used to symbolize his immense love need for Daisy, is no longer relevant at that moment.

An example of Maslow's theory, which states that everything is relative to the current situation of the individual.

However, if his love for Daisy was so immense, should it not be in the top of Maslow's pyramid of human needs? Was Gatsby not happy to an extent where no other need was needed. Did he not climb the pyramid of human needs, when he was together with Daisy? Was he not standing exactly at the top of the pyramid in those moments?

From a perspective of Maslow's theory, the esteem needs and the need of self-actualization are placed higher than the love needs, in the pyramid of needs. That means that if Gatsby's love needs are gratified, then esteem needs will emerge. It is, however, argued previously in the paper that those two needs, namely love needs and esteem needs, influence each other. So, fulfilling the love needs can influence the esteem needs, and the other way around. Focusing on esteem needs, based on the previous description of them in this paper, it can be seen how a good self-esteem will lead towards feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capacity and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world, whereas not being gratified in your esteem needs will lead towards feeling helplessness, weakness, and inferiority.

It can be argued, based on the story of the book, that both Gatsby's love needs and esteem needs are depending on Daisy. On page 128, Gatsby tells about the first day he saw Daisy:

“But he knew that he was in Daisy's house by a colossal accident. However glorious might his future as Jay Gatsby, he was at present a penniless young man without a past, and at any moment the invisible cloak of his uniform might slip from his shoulders. So he made the most of his time. He took what he could get, ravenously and unscrupulously - eventually he took Daisy one still October night, took her because he had no real right to touch her hand” (Fitzgerald, 1925:128)

He, Jay Gatsby, knew that he was not in the same social class as Daisy, when he met her

the first time. However, he let Daisy believe that he was “a person from much the same strata as herself” (Fitzgerald, 1925:129). From this, it could be argued that Gatsby would feel that he was from the same strata as Daisy, if he could get together with her. This raises new questions: If Daisy gratifies Gatsby's love needs and esteem needs, what about Daisy's needs, and Tom's? The following chapter will focus on safety needs, love needs, and esteem needs - with a specific focus on Daisy and Tom.

### ***7.2.2. Safety Needs, Love Needs, or Esteem Needs***

Following this, Daisy satisfies Gatsby's love needs and esteem needs. However, what does Gatsby and Tom mean to Daisy, in a perspective of Maslow's theory?

It is clear that Daisy was in love with Gatsby, based on the stories told about them by Jordan. The following quote is from Jordan, who told Nick about the first time she saw Gatsby: “They were so engrossed in each other that she didn't see me until I was five feet away” (Fitzgerald,1925:66). Jordan continues her story by telling this:

“Wild rumours were circulating about her - how her mother had found her packing her bag one winter night to go to New York and say goodbye to a soldier who was going overseas. She was effectually prevented, but she wasn't on speaking terms with her family for several weeks.” (Fitzgerald,1925:66)

So, Daisy was madly in love with Gatsby from the day they met. She wanted to go all the way from Louisville to New York to say goodbye to him, but she was effectually prevented by her own family. Following this, it can be argued that Gatsby gratified Daisy's love needs, but how about her safety needs or esteem needs? It is essential to remember that Gatsby made Daisy believe that he was from the same social class or strata as her. This means that Daisy believed that Gatsby could take care of her, in the same way as her family had taken care of her in her childhood.

A couple of years went by, while Gatsby was a soldier in Europe. He sent her letters every time possible, and Daisy received them with great anticipation. She also sent letters the

other way. However, Daisy “wanted her life shaped now, immediately - and the decision must be made by some force - of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality - that was close at hand” (Fitzgerald, 1925:131). And in the middle of spring that force took shape with the arrival of Tom Buchanan. Jordan describes that: “there was a wholesome bulkiness about his person and his position, and Daisy was flattered” (Fitzgerald, 1925:131). All this said, however, Daisy received a letter from Gatsby on the day of her wedding. She was devastated, as Jordan tells to Nick in the following sequence of the book:

“I was a bridesmaid. I came into her room half an hour before the bridal dinner, and found her lying on her bed as lovely as the June night in her flowered dress - and as drunk as a monkey. She had a bottle of Sauterne in one hand and a letter in the other.

“Gratulate me,” she muttered. “Never had a drink before, but oh how I do enjoy it”

“What's the matter, Daisy?”

I was scared, I can tell you; I'd never seen a girl like that before.

Here, deares”, She groped around in a waste-basket she had with her on the bed and pulled out the string of pearls.

“Take 'em downstairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em downstairs and give 'em back to whoever they belong to. Tell 'em all Daisy change her mind. Say: “Daisy change her mine”

She began to cry - she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid, and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of the letter.” (Fitzgerald, 1925:67)

So, Daisy was in love with Gatsby back then, and she was not, and arguably never was, in love with Tom in the same way. However, Tom could gratify Daisy's safety needs and esteem needs - as could Gatsby according to her knowledge about him at that point in time.

To summarize, Gatsby gratified Daisy's love needs, and arguably to a higher extent than Tom ever did. However, Daisy later understands that Jay Gatsby was actually not Jay Gatsby, but that he was Jimmy Gatz from a poor family in the Midwest. Following this, Daisy would possibly question whether Gatsby was able to gratify her safety needs and esteem needs. Especially compared to Tom Buchanan, who would unquestionably be able to give Daisy a sense of security, and he was also from the same strata as herself.

So, Daisy thought that Gatsby could gratify her safety, love, and esteem needs. However, she later questions that, when she understands the real story about Gatsby. Tom, nonetheless, is able to gratify her safety and esteem needs, but how about the love needs?

To answer this question, let's turn to scene at Plaza Hotel, where Daisy understands the real story about Gatsby: "She began to sob helplessly. "I did love him once - but I loved you too.'" (Fitzgerald,1925:114). So, Daisy did love Tom once. However, why did Daisy choose Tom Buchanan in the end? Did she love him more than she loved Gatsby? Arguably not, and she most probably loved Gatsby more than Tom.

So, Daisy loved Gatsby to an extent that was never the same with Tom, but Gatsby was not able to gratify Daisy's safety needs and esteem needs in the same way as Tom. So, the overclass woman, Daisy, chose safety and esteem in the end. A woman who has never been threatened on those two needs before in her life.

### ***7.2.3 Materialism. An Empty House of Wonder***

This part chapter provides a comprehension of Jay Gatsby and the characters of the Great Gatsby, which is based on the theoretical understanding of materialism that is provided in chapter 6.1.1 - Materialism and the Individual. So, what is the role of materialism for the characters in the book? Kasser (2002) argues that people who are exceptionally focused on materialistic goals have a tendency to have a low self-esteem, as specified in chapter 6.1.1.

The reasoning for this tendency is that the fact that there will always be a gap between ideals and the actual situation for the individual. This means that the individual, who is particularly focused on materialistic values, will feel less positive about themselves because of this chronic gap between how they wish it would be and how the situation actually is. So, the individual will always look for the next materialistic value, and will never be satisfied with the current situation.

The focus of this chapter is on Jay Gatsby, who grew up in a poor family in the Midwest. So, from this it can be concluded that he grew up without having a lot of materialistic values. He later became rich, and lived in a gigantic house in West Egg near New York City. So, Gatsby went from being poor to become rich, a typical story of the American Dream, but was he satisfied with his materialistic values, when he had the gigantic house in West Egg? And, what materialistic value did this house have for Gatsby and his self-esteem?

Gatsby met with Daisy and Nick for a cup of tea at Nick's home, as mentioned before. He later invited them to his place, and this specific sequence is from their walk from Nick's place to Gatsby's place, and a small tour inside Gatsby's place:

“Instead of taking the short cut along the South we went down to the road and entered this aspect of that of the feudal silhouette against the sky, admired the gardens, the sparkling odour of jonquils and the frothy odour of hawthorn and plum blossoms and the pale gold odour of kiss-me-at-the-gate. It was strange to reach the marble steps and find no stir of bright dress in and out of the door, and hear no sound but bird voices in the trees. And inside, as we wandered through Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration Salons, I felt that there were guests concealed behind every couch and table, under orders to the breathlessly silent until we had passed through. As Gatsby closed the door of “the Merton College Library” I could have sworn I heard the owl-eyes man break into ghostly laughter. We went upstairs, through period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk and vivid with new flowers, through dressing-rooms and pool rooms, and bathrooms,

with sunken baths - introducing into one chamber where a dishevelled man in pyjamas was doing liver exercises on the floor. It was Mr Klipspringer, the "boarder". I had seen him wandering hungrily about the beach that morning. Finally we came to Gatsby's own apartment, a bedroom and a bath, and an Adam study, where we sat down and drank a glass of some Chartreuse he took from a cupboard in the wall." (Fitzgerald, 1925:79)

From this sequence it can be seen how Gatsby intentionally shows Daisy and Nick as much as possible of his house. And, during the entire walk he had not once ceased looking at Daisy. Nick continues the story by telling that: "I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes" (Fitzgerald, 1925:80). The marvelous garden, the beautiful entrance, the marble filled inside, the Marie Antoinette music rooms, and so on were not mainly functioning as luxuries that Gatsby enjoyed himself. For example, he had not used his pool before the day he got shot by Wilson. No, the beautiful house and all the beautiful details were functioning as a social class confirmation, that should make Daisy believe that he, Gatsby, was from the strata as her. That was why he revalued everything according to the response from Daisy. So, the materials functioned as a self-esteem development for Jay Gatsby. He could now impress Daisy, and hopefully get her back. Following this, he did not aim for the next materialistic value. There was not a chronic gap between ideals and actual situation in a perspective of materialistic values.

Focusing on the understanding of materialism, which is provided in chapter 4.1.1, it can be seen how Kasser (2002) argues that people who are exceptionally focused on materialistic goals have a tendency to have a low self-esteem. This means that their worth is depending on materialistic achievements and the praise of others. Is Jay Gatsby a person who has a low self-esteem, and whose worth is depending on materialistic values?

Looking at chapter 7, in *The Great Gatsby*, it can be seen how his self-image of Jay Gatsby is somehow collapsing in front of Tom, Nick, Jordan, and Daisy's eyes, when they are at the Plaza Hotel. This self-image of himself that he has constructed throughout the

story, and which is to a great extent based on his gigantic and beautiful house, his car, and the beautiful clothes. So, he has used materialism to create an image of himself, and that image collapsed because the others figured out the real story about him - that he grew up in a poor family, that he did not go to Oxford, and that he earned his money from the illegal alcohol business. However, he still had his gigantic and beautiful house. So, his self-image and self-esteem did not collapse because he lost his materialistic values. But it could be imagined that he would have lost his self-image and self-esteem if he had lost his materialistic values, such as the house, car, and his clothes - because then he would just have been a non-rich man who was not from the same strata as Daisy.

#### **7.2.4. The Need for Self Actualization**

Previously in this internal analysis there has been a focus on the safety needs, love needs, and esteem needs. However, what about the need for self-actualization, which is the highest need in Maslow's pyramid?

Following this, it is important to recognize, as it is explained in chapter 6.1.2.5, that the clear emergence of the self-actualization needs rests upon prior satisfaction of the physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs. So, it is important to understand that characters who have the need for self-actualization are characters who are gratified in the prior four needs. Moreover, Maslow (1971) has this detailed description of the individuals who have the need for self-actualization, and who already have the physiological and safety needs covered:

“This is to say that they have a feeling of belongingness and rootedness, they are satisfied in their love needs, have friends and feel loved and lovable, they have status and place in life and respect from other people, and they have a reasonable feeling of worth and self-respect” (Maslow, 1971: 299).

From this, the first focus of this chapter will be on Jay Gatsby. Does he, Gatsby, reach a condition where all the prior four needs are satisfied? Does he fit to the previous



description of people who have the need for self-actualization? In his youth, he grew up in a poor farming family in the Midwest, where it can be questioned to what extent the physiological and safety needs were gratified. He later became rich, and this enabled him to satisfy the physiological and safety needs. But does he have a feeling of belongingness and rootedness? Arguably not, based on the entire story, because it can be argued that he only has a feeling of belongingness when he is together with Daisy. He, in those situations, feels like he belongs with her. It can also be argued that he does not have many real friends. Especially, considering the amount of people who show up to his funeral, in the end of the story.

Gatsby's respect from other people and his feeling of worth is mainly based on his social status. He is seen as the rich man, with the gigantic house, and the large parties. However, it can be argued that this image falls apart, to some extent, in chapter 7, when Tom rips apart his self-created image of himself, in front of the eyes of Nick, Jordan, and - most importantly - Daisy.

But what about the love needs? Gatsby is in love with Daisy, and there are times in the book where his love needs are gratified. For example, in chapter 5, where Gatsby is together with Daisy and Nick in his house. At that moment in time, when he is with Daisy he is gratified in his love needs. Being there with Daisy has been his dream, and now it came true. The green light on the dock, which symbolized his love needs, was gone in that moment. He was now, arguably, gratified in a way that fits the description of people who are having the need for self-actualization. But the times he was gratified in that way were limited. So limited that it can be argued that there was no time for the next need in Maslow's pyramid to emerge.

This sharp understanding of Maslow's theory of human needs can be critically questioned, though. For example, the need for self-actualization is related to what the individual is fitted for. So, this means that a musician must make music, a poet must write, and etc. This means, according to the theory, that a musician does not have the need to make music before the first four prior needs are covered.

How about Tom Buchanan? Could it be argued that he has had the four prior needs satisfied in a long enough period of time for the need of self-actualization to emerge? He has the physiological and safety gratified, and also the esteem needs. But, how about the love needs. Does Daisy gratify his love needs, considering the fact that he is having affairs with other women, which he probably has to satisfy his esteem needs? Whether or not he has the prior four needs gratified to an extent where the need for self-actualization is emerging, is an interesting question with arguably different interpretations. But it is clear that he is not behaving in a way that will possibly satisfy his needs for self-actualization. This is due to the fact that self-actualizing people are involved in something outside themselves, and this is without one single exception, as Maslow (1971) describes it. However, Tom and also Daisy do generally only behave egoistically, and are not involved in something besides themselves. The involvement in something outside themselves, in a perspective of Maslow's theory, is related to the 15 B-values. For example, B-value 2 is called goodness, and the pathogenic deprivation is evilness. From this, it can be argued that Tom and Daisy in general do not behave in a way that can be defined as goodness. Rather opposite, especially Tom has some opinions and behavior that can be defined as evilness. Following the *B-Values and Specific Metapathologies* table in this paper, it can be seen how behaving evil will lead to: "Utter selfishness, hatred, repulsion, disgust, nihilism, cynicism, and reliance only upon self and for self."

The main focus of this paper is on Jay Gatsby, though. Following this, it can be argued that Jay Gatsby never reaches the need for self-actualization, based on the fact that he only has his love needs covered a few times, and for a short period of time.

### ***7.3 The External Analysis of Jay Gatsby: The Marxist Perspective***

Around the same time F. Scott Fitzgerald had *The Great Gatsby* published in the United States, as well as the time in which the novel itself takes place, the years 1925 and 1922, respectively, Marxism was on the rise elsewhere in the world. Following the Russian

Revolution, the Soviet Union (or USSR) was established throughout a big part of Eastern Europe, governed primarily by the anti-imperialistic Leninism, a key component of early communism, which in turn was derived from the Marxist political philosophy of the 19th century. In Denmark, the people elected their first socialist government in 1924, headed by Thorvald Stauning, leader of the Social Democrats, who would later go on to become the longest serving Prime Minister in all of Danish history. But in the United States, Marxism and Socialism were far from commonly accepted political opinions, seeing as they basically contradict most things about the all-American capitalist ideology and the concept of the American Dream, and people who adhered to the socialist thought were ostracized or even persecuted and hence had to do so practically in secret, especially after the relationship with the Soviets grew sour and they became America's opponent during the Cold War (the so-called Red Scare). As a result, anyone who dared venture anywhere near the left wing of the political spectrum was branded a "commie" and an enemy of the state. Not until very recently have Americans started embracing social politics. First, during the two tenures of Barack Obama, who otherwise is a classic example of a liberal democrat, where he introduced a system of universal healthcare, or Obamacare, and currently with the famous - or, to some, infamous - presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who is known to be heavily inspired by the European and especially Scandinavian ideas of social democracy and as a result has won eighteen states in the Democratic Party primaries of 2016. And yet, socialism is still a thorn in the eye of many an American. Mostly because it - as well as its predecessor, Marxism - goes against the entire belief system of the United States and what many find to be the heart and soul of their country: The American Dream, the pursuit of happiness, and the capitalist rise through the economic ranks.

The following section of the project will go away from the internal, psychological analysis of Jay Gatsby to an external one, applying the Marxist understanding to the characters and completing the idea of the two different perspectives.

### 7.3.1 From Gatz to Gatsby

The important question is, how would a true Marxist read a novel like *The Great Gatsby* and understand such a main character as Gatsby himself? How would they interpret him? What kind of overall message would they most likely derive from his persona? First of all, it is important to note that Marxism is supposed to be in direct opposition to American society, politics, and general ideology, especially back then, seeing as all of it is based upon a foundation of the ultra-liberalistic mindset of capitalism. As such, Jay Gatsby, or James "Jimmy" Gatz as he is also known, would be the direct answer to a handful of Marxist prejudices - that is, not considering Gatsby's own personal dreams and goals, as they would be completely irrelevant in a Marxist understanding of the text, practically disregarding his individuality and subjectivity and instead focusing on his role as part of the whole, leaving his inner workings and motivations for other people to work with (psychologists, for example). Gatsby is, in many ways, the very embodiment of the American Dream, which by Marxist standards would be considered something quite negative; the capitalist scourge of American society. During the novel, a lot of rumours are in circulation about the character's background, his *antecedents* as they are called, but in Chapter 6 of the novel Gatsby reveals what is believed to be the true story to Nick Carraway, the narrator. He tells him about his life before the lavish parties at the Gatsby mansion in West Egg, and what truly lay down the roots for his early ambitions. In other words, he explains how he went from Jimmy Gatz to Jay Gatsby, to which Nick comments:

I suppose he'd had the name ready for a long time, even then. His parents were shiftless and unsuccessful farm people - his imagination had never really accepted as his parents at all. The truth was that Jay Gatsby of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God - a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that - and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end. (Fitzgerald, 1925: 80)

In many ways, Gatsby follows all the same rules and lines as many of the successful American businessmen of the era, the early 20th century. But where many Americans would admire his success story, the Marxists would regard him as a prime example of a major capitalist - something, in Marxist theory, not to be admired at all. The young Jimmy Gatz was not an immigrant, but he nonetheless lived according to the teachings of the American Dream. He came from a modest background - some might call it poor - in rural North Dakota, where his German American parents (as mentioned above) were farmers. He was lucky enough to be able to go off to college (as "*An instinct towards his future glory had led him*", Fitzgerald, 1925: 81), the Lutheran St. Olaf's in Minnesota, but his very nature - his pride or even his haughtiness - eventually forbid him from doing the humiliating janitor work that would pay for his tuition and sustain him while getting his degree. Already then, as a Marxist would point out, the man who would go on to become Gatsby, the big business tycoon, rejects the proletarian lifestyle. As he might have put it himself: he did not think himself cut out for that sort of work. So he leaves college and eventually ends up in the service of one Dan Cody, a transactionist who deals in metals, copper especially, and during his following five years working as everything from boatsman to jailer on the *Tuolomee*. Gatsby was taught many, if not most of the traditions of the trade. When Cody died, Gatsby was tricked out of the relatively small inheritance (\$25,000) the millionaire had left him, but he had learned an important lesson nonetheless. He was now able to put words to his own ambitions and knew what he wanted to become. The phrase above - "*the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty*" - can be considered quite ambiguous, but in this context a Marxist would most likely interpret it as the capitalist economy of the United States, in 'God's own country' so to speak (cf.: "*His Father's business*"), to which Gatsby, as a true American hero, pledges his allegiance early on. In other words, he promises himself to always aspire to become the best and most successful capitalist that he can be.

### 7.3.2 The Gatsby Symbolism

The name change alone would trigger any Marxist. Not that changing your birth name, in itself, is considered anti-Marxist - in fact, many of the most prominent Marxist-Leninists did exactly so (for example, Vladimir Ulyanov became Vladimir Lenin, Lev Bronstein became Leon Trotsky, and Ioseb Jughashvili became Joseph Stalin) - but the reason behind the decision might very well be. Officially, the aforementioned Russian revolutionaries - all of whom came from very different ethnic backgrounds - changed their given names to all fit in better with their own vision of the mono-culturally russified Soviet Union, in a political spirit of solidarity and community. Gatsby, however, as well as many other Americans who have done the same, had vastly different motives. Jimmy Gatz became Jay Gatsby at seventeen because he already knew what it would take for him to ascend through the socio-economic classes of American society. Money, while of course at the very center of this intricate equation, could not do it alone - not really. It had to be all about image. 'Gatsby' came to be in the first symbolic step of young Jay on his personal journey, his transition, from a poor, clam-fishing proletarian to a bourgeois money man. Just like his habit of calling practically everyone he knows for 'old sport' - a term not commonly associated with German migrant workers in the Midwest around the turn of the 20th century - the Gatsby moniker is a symbol of extremely high value that makes him, albeit quite insincerely, stand above the rest in the American class system, and contributes to his status more so than all the money in the world. In a sense, 'Gatsby' is not any different than his car, his airplane, his mansion, and his countless parties. Money might have got him all of these things, however money is invisible. You can be the richest man alive, but if you do not act like it, people will not recognize you as such - and recognition, no matter from what perspective you interpret *The Great Gatsby*, internally or externally, is exactly what Gatsby wants. Ergo he has to apply all of these material extensions to his persona for his surroundings to see and acknowledge him exactly like he wants them to. This is naturally something that rubs any true Marxist the wrong way, as he or she is politically dedicated to eroding the established class system of modern society. What Gatsby does is

that he forcefully mixes symbolic and materialistic values, not only to rise in the economic world, but to appear different, more worth, and to further dissociate himself from the common rabble.

### **7.3.3 Gatsby's Utopia**

An important aspect to also take into consideration when discussing a Marxist view of Jay Gatsby is the Utopia theory. While in the primary context of this project, Utopia as a concept is otherwise principally reserved for the psychological branch - the internal perspective, the idea that a person's own Utopia is relative to the needs he or she have got covered and therefore is able to change over time (for example, a man who does not have any food will have a Utopia that corresponds to this need, one where he never goes hungry). It is, however, also a relevant thought in classic Marxist ideology. Therefore it deserves mention in this part of the analysis, too. As Marxism to a great extent is a so-called revolutionary ideology, begging a break with the establishment, the status quo of society, it is naturally closely related to the idea of a societal Utopia. A perfect society, based upon the ideals of Marxism. And as we have already touched upon a few times in this project, this society would be quite different from the one that had formed in the United States; the one Gatsby was a part of. The Marxist Utopia - as it has been expressed in practically all the revolutionary upheavals that have come before the establishment of any of the so-called 'Red States' throughout history - is of course the totally classless society, where the traditional social and economical divisions have been done away with by the proletarian masses in their de-establishment of the bourgeoisie or the aristocracy. But what does all of this have to do with Gatsby? What is his Utopia? Some people might be able to deduce an answer to this question. Some might say that his Utopia is actually rather simple: Daisy. And some scholars of psychology would probably agree. Or not. The only thing quite certain in the context of this discussion is that the Marxist would not care about the character of his Utopia. However, the Utopian thought of Gatsby is still relevant to the Marxists. In other words: they do not care about what he wants, but rather only

about how he tries to get it. His Utopia might be a life with Daisy at his arm, or it might simply be money, power, and fame. This is all irrelevant to the Marxist. Again, we would rather have to focus on the means to his end. It is here we will find the significant boundary between the Marxist Utopia and that of, say, Jay Gatsby, or any person for that matter who adheres to the principles of the American Dream. It is all kept for posterity in the immortal mantra about the so-called inalienable rights that are guaranteed by the United States Declaration of Independence: Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Or, as it is put in this English translation of a classic Danish proverb: Every man is the blacksmith of his own happiness. Either way, this emphasis on individuality and subjectivity is the cornerstone of any liberalistic and capitalistic ideology. And naturally, this would result in some sharp critique by the Marxists. This brings us back to the understanding of Gatsby's Utopia. No matter what it actually is, he seeks it through enhancing his own individuality. His Utopia is relative to his subjectivity, which to a Marxist - a person whose own Utopia is founded upon collectivity - sounds like the outright egoistic and narcissistic ideology of a super-capitalist. To them, all of this represents a downward spiral of society when every person only looks out for his or her own good, especially since most people tend to agree that a 'Utopia' is primarily based upon ideals, that is, something you work towards, and considering it is always relative to a person's current needs, the Utopia will always change accordingly. Hence, to a Marxist, the Gatsby character is merely another contribution to the capitalistic scourge, where the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. In other words, and in the true American spirit, whatever the struggle, Gatsby only fights for himself and his own interests, ignoring the community and anyone who might get hurt in the process.

### **7.3.4 Daisy**

But what about this *internal* perspective? What about Daisy? Is all of this simply completely irrelevant to the Marxists? In theory, yes. Rather than what goes on in Gatsby's mind and what we can call his internal motivations, goals, and developments, the Marxists



are theoretically only concerned with his external impact, his influence on his community and surroundings, and the personal societal consequences he embodies.

It is our intent, however, not to ignore Daisy completely; she also deserves a mention as part of the Marxist understanding. As Daisy is an essential part of the most common interpretation of *The Great Gatsby* - simply that Gatsby does not truly become who he has for the money or the fame, but because he is a helpless romantic incredibly infatuated with Daisy and hopes to catch her attention, and her love, by becoming everything he thinks she wants in a man - going as far as to pretty much explain this directly to the reader, it is something even the most diehard must consider. It might not affect his or her basic understanding of the character, but with such a generally obvious part of the story you cannot merely choose literary blindness. You have to respond to it. So how does a Marxist understand Gatsby with the inclusion of Daisy and in light of the accepted objective truth that he does it all for love?

First of all, one would probably think that Daisy muddies the correlation between Jay Gatsby and the capitalism of the American Dream. But it is through this distancing himself from the simple, common form of capitalism that Gatsby really shines - and not in a positive way - in the eyes of the Marxists. He somehow rises above the other American businessmen, who live and breath capitalism, and learns to understand the entire system from afar. He shows intricate knowledge of the American classes and the country's aristocracy, as well as the connection between money and power in both American ideology and contemporary reality. In other words, Gatsby cynically recognizes the capitalist system as the the means to his own end - the most direct route to Daisy's heart - and it becomes his tool. He ignores what might have been clear alternative methods to get what he wants through an insight of the American spirit. Gatsby might in truth not care at all for the capitalist advancement through the socio-economic classes, yet this does not diminish the Marxist understanding of him as a super-capitalist. In fact, it rather enhances this perception. Gatsby *understands* capitalism in a way most Americans - in the novel at least - seem not to, and he *knows* its consequences. He does not care for it (again, if we

accept that all he wants is Daisy), but is willing to use it for his very personal gain. Through a Marxist perspective, Gatsby beats capitalism at its own game - he moves outside its established boundaries and becomes a criminal to further advance himself - and clearly exploits what a Marxist would perceive as a weak-minded and eventually doomed political and economical system. He might not be a capitalist in the classic sense of the word, but rather an alarmingly sophisticated one who takes things to the next level. For what is Gatsby's price? *His* capital? Daisy, of course. And in the true spirit of egotistically elbowing individualism he is apparently willing to do everything in this power to succeed and get this price, no matter the cost on others. What Gatsby does to earn Daisy's affection simply tells a Marxist that he does not care about the game - as long as he wins.

### **7.3.5 The End of Gatsby**

All of the above goes to show that the Marxist understanding of Jay Gatsby is, of course, vastly different from the more common interpretation of the sympathetic, foolheartedly romantic American hero. The Marxists see an individual who thoroughly engages in the socio-economically unhealthy practice of materialism, consumerism, and general excess. They see an individual who does his utmost to live the capitalist American dream, even going as far as to defy the very rules of said capitalism and break the law in an effort to transcend his working-class background. But what else? How would the Marxists understand the message of the novel?

[...] [Gatsby] must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. He must have looked up at an unfamiliar sky through frightening leaves and shivered as he found what a grotesque thing a rose is and how raw the sunlight was upon the scarcely created grass. A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about ... like that ashen, fantastic figure gliding towards him through the amorphous trees. (Fitzgerald, 1925: 132)

The quote above is retrieved from Nick's reflection on the final moments of Jay Gatsby's life, just before he is shot dead on the inflatable mattress in his pool by automobile repairman George Wilson (who in turn commits suicide) who firmly believes that Gatsby is the secret lover of his departed wife, Myrtle, as well as her hit-and-run murderer. While not the end of the novel - Nick is allowed the final chapter to round up the storyline - this is where we last see Gatsby, a broken man who has been turned down by woman he loves, Daisy, and therefore failed at his entire scheme. The ending of *The Great Gatsby* and of its main eponymous character himself have been interpreted and understood in a number of different ways, since the publication of the novel and especially following the rise of its popularity. These interpretations range from a fairly negative point of view to aspects of practical atonement and absolution for the character. The question is, yet again, how the Marxists would understand Gatsby's demise; also in light of the entire storyline and its development.

In many ways, the life of Jay Gatsby constitutes a classic cautionary tale for the Marxists, something at which to point their fingers and say: "You see? *That's* what happens.". All in all, the Marxists would - disregarding how the author himself might have felt and intended with his novel - perceive Fitzgerald's literary work as highly critical of its contemporary period in American societal history, in which the Gatsby character is supposed engage and henceforth represent. In short, *The Great Gatsby* is about the rise and inevitable fall of a capitalist, an egotistical, individualistic, and materialistic man who has been formed by and responded to this erratic form of society structure present in the United States. Gatsby is not a bad guy, a villain, but from a Marxist perspective he is similarly far from being the hero. He is more like a tragic character who consistently fails to realize what really is important in life (again, for a Marxist, ideals like community and solidarity) and ergo commits a wide range of fouls in pursuit of his own goals and own personal happiness, for which he eventually gets his just deserts. One might even go as far as to interpret George Wilson, Gatsby's gunman, as the punishment, a form of poetic justice (while most interpreters see Daisy's final turndown as the point that broke Gatsby, who - as such -

does not really mind being shot). In many ways, Wilson represents the frustration of an increasingly more exploited and otherwise tread-down American proletariat by the selfish and careless system of rich, bourgeois capitalists. The fact that Wilson snaps and shoots Gatsby in his pool at the end of the novel, could, to a Marxist, represent their own classic goal of an armed revolution against the rulers of society by a working class of people who have had enough and want to put their foot down.

### **7.3.6 Jay Gatsby vs. Tom Buchanan**

It was very obviously important for F. Scott Fitzgerald to create a clear distinction between the two main fat cats, Jay Gatsby and his counterpart, Daisy's husband Thomas "Tom" Buchanan, not only for the sake of the story, but in an effort to correctly position the sympathies of the reader. He does so by attributing to Tom, other than writing him plainly repellent, unlikable, and even provocative, many different characteristics that would have been perceived as extremely negative, if not by contemporary general population, per se, then at least by most of Fitzgerald's artsy peers, and have only become increasingly more relevant as the novel has progressed through the 20th century up until today. Not only is Tom an elitist anti-democrat (in the original sense of the word, not only to be associated with the Democratic Party of the United States, which Tom most certainly also resents), he is by extension a misogynist and a white supremacist, none of which can be directly said about Gatsby - at least as far as the readers know. In the 1920s, the causes of women and the black minorities were hot topics, especially in certain political interest group and especially in the northern United States, where *The Great Gatsby* primarily was written and since received. For example, women had recently (Amendment XIX to the American Constitution, ratified on August 18, 1920) gained the right to vote, and being a persistent nay sayer years later would most certainly be something that could show a man like Tom Buchanan in a worse light than Gatsby.

However, in the novel the greatest difference between Gatsby and Buchanan is not their opinions on political matters, but - in terms of storyline progression - rather what we can

call the capital culture of the United States. As such, we are back at the ancient song about the Old Money and the New, or *nouveau riche*, the first of which naturally resents the second and often vice versa. Tom, the rich Chicagoan, was born into a wealthy family of American aristocrats. Whereas, Gatsby worked his way up from the very bottom of the socio-economic classes in American society. This is one of the primary focal points and conflicts of the story; that Tom's hundred dollar bill essentially turns out to be worth more than Gatsby's, in terms of heavily loaded symbolic value that stretches back generations, and therefore he secures Daisy's continued loyalty in the end. To some it might have been the other way around, depending on one's own cultural background and system of values. But some, such as Daisy Buchanan, do think blood more important than hard, albeit in Gatsby's case not that honest, work. It is by many thought to have been one of Fitzgerald's most important comments with his novel, this properly foolish nature of the clash between the riches, and the importance of reputation and how it can apparently easily trump something as pure as love.

Then, what would a Marxist make of this distinction between the two characters and their different kinds of riches? Is Buchanan sufficient to make the Marxist change his or her mind about Gatsby? Theoretically, no. Any person with a eyes in their head and a shred of decency - especially in today's context - would probably thoroughly dislike and disagree with Tom Buchanan. He is simply a character constructed as such, not a classical villain, per se, but one who has a certain ominous feel to him. If you do not think so, Fitzgerald himself would probably believe that you had not fully understood the essence of the story, and advise you to read it again for good measure. But as human as the Marxist might feel the urge to be in such a situation, the ideology itself would be stern and steadfast. Once again, the internal movements of a character such as Tom Buchanan - whatever they might be - neither absolve him of his out in the real world, in the community, nor do they worsen them; and they especially do not affect Gatsby in any way possible. That they have acquired their respective wealth in two very different fashions do not make either of them any less of a capitalist. Tom Buchanan is a character constructed as to make the reader

even more sympathetic to the likes of Gatsby, but in the Marxist interpretation Buchanan is all but irrelevant. A comment can be made that the Buchanan archetype is the source of the Gatsby archetype, that Buchanan is the inspiration and Gatsby the inspired, and hence that they both each represent a spoke in the ever turning wheel that is American capitalism. But as much as this might serve as an explanation to Gatsby's actions in the novel, it does not defend them. If anything, it simply reaffirms the Marxist belief that American society, at its core, is nothing but a cruelly capitalist institution that inspires those who have the least with dreams and pursuits of crushing their fellow men and women to become just like those who have the most.

### ***7.3.7 The Great Gatsby: The Cultural Impact***

As mentioned before in this project, when the phenomenon that is *The Great Gatsby* first came out in the Spring of 1925 it was met with lukewarm reviews from most contemporary literary critics and with meager sales, much to author F. Scott Fitzgerald's dismay, and it was not until much later - almost twenty years, following Fitzgerald's death, in the 1940s - that it began rising in popularity with the American and international public. Today it is almost impossible to fathom how a novel as famous as *The Great Gatsby*, by many considered to be the Great American Novel, or at least as close to as we have yet to experience, was once disregarded and practically forgotten. There are many explanations as to why it suddenly went from being nothing to rapidly gain quite a lot of fame, and most are a bit more intricate than Bob Batchelor's idea of the cream always rising to the top. From a theoretical point of view, at least, a Marxist would certainly understand the rise of what is today regarded as Fitzgerald's magnum opus as a bit more complicated than to be merely predestined by fate. And the Marxist does so by deriving his or her own understanding of the novel and adding it to a perspective on the cultural movements in American society at the time, thereby coming to a theoretical understanding of the readers and reviewers of the different ages.

The different critical points held against *The Great Gatsby* by its reviewers were generally

that is was boring, tiring, forced, and unnecessarily cynical - and that it did not, in any way whatsoever, measure up to what at the time was regarded as the literary golden boy Fitzgerald's absolute masterpiece, *This Side of Paradise* (1920). H.L. Mencken of the *Chicago Tribune* went as far as to say that the two books did not even belong on the same shelf, and otherwise referred to *The Great Gatsby* as "... no more than a glorified anecdote, and not too probable at that." Isabel Paterson, of the *New York Herald Tribune* section "Books", wrote that what has never been alive cannot go on living and predicted no other future for the novel than to be a seasonal read. All in all, the review published in the TIME magazine of May, 1925, was more favourable, but not nearly as much as the 1933 issue that included an interview with Gertrude Stein, in which the intellectual told the journalist that F. Scott Fitzgerald "will be read when many of his well known contemporaries are forgotten." Theoretically, in light of the culture and society in the United States at the time, Marxism understands this reaction in a certain way.

In the decade of the so-called Roaring Twenties, Americans in general had it good. The economy following World War I was at an all time high, and materialism and consumerism had become national pastimes of the capitalist state. As a result of this context, a Marxist would say, *The Great Gatsby* and especially its main character, Jay Gatsby, were interpreted in a certain, usually explicitly negative way. In a way that aligns very well with the general Marxist understanding of the novel; though not all - if that many at all - Americans at the time could be considered Marxist or socialist in any sense. One way of understanding why *The Great Gatsby* did not receive a particularly warm welcome in the middle of the 1920s would be that the people who read and reviewed it interpreted the novel as containing a negative, quite critical stance on capitalism and the American Dream (though this term had not formally been put to words yet, it was already an established part of American culture and self-image and had been so for many years). Gatsby is a character who starts from the bottom and reaches the top, all in the span in less than 200 pages, in an effort to achieve his personal, individualistic, and egotistical dreams, wishes, and goals. He does so in a regular storm of materialistic spending sprees and endless,

symbolically shining parties, reflecting the behavior of many an American at the time, and especially the hip young crowd to which Fitzgerald himself belonged and pandered literarily. These were well-to-do people who did not like to see their life and appertaining materialistic happiness dragged through the literary mud in such critically cynical and - to some - even cautionary fashion. To the Marxist, the initially negative reaction to *The Great Gatsby* could be perceived as an example of a sudden blip of social conscience - and *bad* conscience at that - on behalf of the American population. They simply did not enjoy being confronted with the notion that their way of life was affront to someone outside their personal view and had resulted in such a scolding written remark. As such, the strategy of figurative blinders was applied, as - a Marxist would claim - is typically worn in a society too deprived of community and solidarity. In short, what happened was that the public responded with a negative review to what they had themselves interpreted as a negative review of their own existence.

But what happened then? Time happened. Times changed and so did the cultural perspective and mentality of the American people. During the 1940s, and especially as the war came along, *The Great Gatsby* was revitalized and given a place within the heart of the American literary canon which has only grown in importance and appreciation over the following decades. A lot happened to the novel in the 1940s. According to Batchelor, following Fitzgerald's early death in December, 1940, many of his distraught friends, among them fellow authors Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway, felt that his talent had not been appreciated in his own lifetime and began sort of a campaign to promote his work. Alongside this, the war effort helped quite a lot. The many G.I.s that were stationed within American borders as well as around the world were supplied with cheap paperback reprints of old novels to help pass the time when not on active duty, and one of these was *The Great Gatsby* (many of which were already collecting dust in Fitzgerald's personal storage following the unsuccessful first publishing almost twenty years prior). These are all very practical reasons behind Gatsby capturing the attention of the American public: Large numbers combined with favourable endorsements at the right time. Immediately one can



see that this is exactly the opposite of what Fitzgerald achieved with the novel in the 1920s; a basic recipe for instant literary success, albeit a little too late. But there might be a little more to the sudden rise in popularity of *The Great Gatsby*, other than mere practicalities.

By the early 1940s, most Americans had spent the preceding years facing quite a few hardships, especially those economically themed during the era of the Great Depression, but now things slowly started looking brighter and brighter. Returning to normalcy, hope sprung and the pessimism that had defined the period of economic recession disappeared. The Americans slowly developed an entirely new outlook on life and its products, meaning a solid basis for a completely revisioned understanding of a formerly critically panned work of fiction like *The Great Gatsby*. It makes sense that Americans would suddenly see Jay Gatsby in a whole new light. In a time of searching for the real American hero and role model, Gatsby fit the shoe perfectly. He is man of humble beginnings who has made it big, solely relying on his talents, aspirations, and hopes for the future. This probably resonated well with most parts of the American general population in the 1940s. They could identify with Gatsby, and see themselves in his image. Americans were no longer rich and careless materialists like they had once been, and like their money had gone away so had their perception of Gatsby as a negative trope of themselves. Gatsby was no longer the literary embodiment of critique, but rather an icon for a new generation of Americans who had to build on the foundation of ups and downs that had come before; they wanted what he had. To them, he became something for which to strive in a time when the concept of materialism still awaited the American public in the dream of a brighter future. In a sense, Gatsby gave new life and meaning to the idea of the American Dream. When he was first introduced in 1925, the Dream might have grown a bit stale for many in the years of seemingly effortless success, and as such he was perceived as irrelevant and forced. It is difficult to keep dreaming when you already have everything you could ever imagine. But in the 1940s, Americans could dream again and hence Gatsby woke from his slumber. This is a prime example of how the fundamental basis of one's own personal

comprehension and perception can be rather radically altered through defining changes to aspects of culture, society, economics, and politics. As a Marxist would put it, the new context has made way for an entirely new understanding of Jay Gatsby as a character and of capitalism as a classic American virtue.

## 8. Conclusion

Daisy chose Tom despite her great and immense love for Gatsby. So, Daisy chose her safety and esteem needs over her love needs, when the imaginary image of Jay Gatsby cracked at the Plaza Hotel. This indicates a critique of the American society in the Roaring Twenties, where safety needs and esteem needs were preferred over love needs.

Following the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression bombs the population back to prior needs on Maslow's pyramid of needs, due to the economic recession. Away from esteem needs that are controlled by materialism, such as Gatsby's beautiful and enormous house. So, people during the Great Depression did not have the same materialistic possibilities, and they, therefore, started to understand the critique of the materialistic and superficial Roaring Twenties with other eyes. All this started making the green light visible, metaphorically, for the people in the Great Depression, and on to World War II when the book became really popular. Contradicting to the people during the Roaring Twenties, who did not understand, or would not accept the critique - that the culture of the Roaring Twenties had created a culture in which nobody searched or could see the green light, besides Gatsby, the later great hero, who still believed in love, in the jungle of materialism and superficiality during the Roaring Twenties.

Gatsby did everything that was needed in order to get to the same strata as Daisy. He provided an image that would cover Daisy's safety and esteem needs, but the self-created image cracked in the end. He followed the materialistic culture of the Roaring Twenties, only for love, but was led down by the materialism and superficiality of the period and the characters. This started to become visible to the audience, after the Roaring Twenties, and this postponed the popularity of the book to after the period - when people either understood why Gatsby was a great hero, or accepted that he was a great hero.

What the Marxist theoretical approach and reading of *The Great Gatsby* teach us is that Jay Gatsby is nothing but a common capitalist. He exists and moves through society only with his own personal gain and hence his rising social status in mind, keeping in mind that

the Marxists do not regard any of Gatsby's possible internal motivations as valid. In the sense, he is the formidable archetype of the American Dream. Although not an immigrant, he starts off with next to nothing in his pockets, his family being Midwestern farm people, and commences his own pursuit of happiness in the capitalist economic culture of the United States, ending close to the very top of society. Marxism might even regard Gatsby as more than just a capitalist - sort of a *super-capitalist* - because not only does he beat capitalist America at its own game (by breaking the rules, turning to crime), evidence shows that he does not really care for any of it - if we include Daisy in the analytical mix - but is still willing to exploit this weak-minded, unstable system, deprived of community and solidarity, to further his own position and eventually get what he wants. Not even comparing him to the closest thing the novel has to a villain, Tom Buchanan, can redeem the Gatsby character in the eyes of the Marxist, even though the author tries. Gatsby does not have the same essentially negative character traits as Buchanan, but once again this means nothing to the Marxists. They might not have acquired their vast economic resources in the same way, but Old Money Buchanan and *nouveau riche* Gatsby still merely represent the two sides of the capitalist coin and respective flaws in the capitalist system altogether. One is the inspiration and one is the inspired. With regards to the culture and cultural changes during the almost three decades in United States it took for *The Great Gatsby* to grow popular with the American people, the Marxist perspective suggests that the public understanding of Gatsby is relative to the cultural and economic position of the audience. In the 1920s, when people had the means to live more lavishly and materialistically, they disregarded Gatsby as a critique of themselves. In other words, they had a bad social conscience and felt that Gatsby put negative words to their abundant lifestyles. By the 1940s, however, Americans had been through the Great Depression and the early stages of World War II. They now knew economic hardship - many people at the time might have experienced nothing but that in their own lifetimes. This is when the understanding of Gatsby rapidly changed. He was brought down from the shelf and dusted off, no longer a critical view of the American materialist, but rather a capitalist inspiration

for the future. In other words, the American Dream had been restarted, and the American people now wanted what Gatsby had and understood him as a hero rather than a crook.

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