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A STUDY OF *THE GREAT GATSBY* AS A NATIONAL ALLEGORY

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RESUMO

A presente dissertação aborda a questão da experiência nacional representada alegoricamente no romance –*O Grande Gatsby*. Meu objetivo é estudar esta relação baseada na sedução estética do romance e a sua proposta de redirecionamento do Sonho Americano dos anos 20. Estudos Culturais e de Gênero fazem parte do embasamento teórico na observação de valores que são questionados e/ou perpetuados através de representações de gênero, classe social, raça e etnia no romance. A organização espacial da narrativa é entendida como um sistema estrutural em que o pertencimento de personagens a determinados “lugares” e cenários gera relações hierárquicas de poder, representadas por polaridades espaciais. Este trabalho sugere que os privilégios de algumas posições sociais estão representados alegoricamente na narrativa. O conceito de alegoria de Walter Benjamin enfatiza o estudo da temporalidade associada ao espaço narrativo e permite que se faça uma leitura do sentido gerado por essas representações, na medida em que expõe, e não omite, as contradições da narrativa. Estas remetem à impossibilidade de concretização histórica do Sonho Americano que é questionado e também re-valorizado através de sua ligação a um ideal pastoril em conflito com as demandas de uma ideologia marcadamente materialista no período entre-guerras. Desta forma, a sobreposição de níveis temporais no romance liga a crença do excepcionalismo americano, patriotismo e herança cultural a um imaginário pastoril, em que uma versão do passado é legitimada e projetada para o futuro nacional.

Palavras-chave: *O Grande Gatsby*- Estudos Culturais- Gênero- O Sonho Americano- alegoria nacional- representação

ABSTRACT

This dissertation approaches the issue of a national experience represented allegorically in the novel – *The Great Gatsby*. My aim is to study this relation based on the novel's esthetical seduction and its proposal of representing the new directions of the American Dream in the 1920s. Cultural and Gender Studies are employed as theoretical tools in order to observe the values questioned and/or perpetuated by the novel's representation of gender, social class, race and ethnicity. The spatial organization of the narrative is conceived as a structural system in which the characters' sense of belongingness to specific places and settings creates their hierarchical relations of power, represented by space polarities. This dissertation hopes to prove that specific social positions are inscribed allegorically in the narrative as owners of privileges in the representation of society. Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory emphasizes the study of temporality, which is associated to space in the narrative, and allows one to conceive the meanings created by the mentioned representations, exposing the narrative's contradictions. They lead to the historical impossibility of fulfillment of the American Dream. In the novel, the dream is questioned and also re-valued due to its link to a pastoral ideal in conflict with the demands of a materialistic ideology in the world war period. In this sense, the superposition of temporal levels in the novel connects a belief in American exceptionalism, patriotism and cultural heritage to a pastoral imagery, in which a version of the past is legitimized and projected to a national future.

Key- words: *The Great Gatsby*- Gender – Cultural Studies- American Dream – national allegory – representation.

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1. Introduction

Every reader of *The Great Gatsby* has a dream greater than reality can afford. His/her dream of being recognized as the elected to occupy an advantaged position in society, due to his/her own personal effort and ability, still works as an advertisement of success. It leads to our identification with the main character. Besides, his romantic image tempered by money is also what our Brazilian culture teaches us to love and to look for.

A great deal has been written about Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Indeed, since its publication in 1925, many critics have focused their researches on the novel's historical, auto-biographical, mythic, psychological, religious and even gendered aspects. Critics have scrutinized the novel's setting, plot, symbology of colors, withering of the myth of the American Dream¹, romantic sensibility, pastoral imagery, the American Adam myth. Speculations have also been made about other works which influenced the creation of *The Great Gatsby* like Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, or T.S. Eliot's Poem *The Waste Land*, besides many others. The novel is acclaimed as part of the Western literary cannon and it is difficult to find a single Brazilian academic student of North-American literature who has never heard of Gatsby.

This means that I place myself in the uncomfortable position of someone who hopes to add some considerations about a book that has been read so many times, by many experts and that is considered a masterpiece of Western Modern literature. By proposing a re-reading of the novel I hope to connect its esthetical seduction to its ideological persuasion observing the values it questions and/or perpetuates throughout the contradictions of the novel. To this extend, I start with some personal remarks about my identification with the story. Then I contextualize the novel and its author; right after, I explain a little bit about my conception of literature, language and allegory in order to justify my choice for this literary text. Finally, I will define basic categories for my analysis.

My aim in this thesis is to examine representations of class, gender, race and ethnicity that appear intrinsically connected to a division of space and time in the novel. The proposal of this dissertation is to verify the pertinence of the assumption that the novel is a

¹ In the early 1920s, the American Dream was already on the skids. Originally based on the idea that the pursuit of happiness involves not only material success but moral and spiritual growth, the dream had, by Fitzgerald's time, become increasingly focused on money and pleasure (MIZENER, 1955, p.15).

national allegory as it projects allegorically the new directions of the American Dream in the twenties. The relations between the categories- gender, race, ethnicity and class- provide new insights about the American Dream when we consider the spatial organization of the narrative as a structured system in which the characters' relations of belongingness to specific places determine his/her power or lack of it. Through the articulation of these categories in terms of characterization and setting we can think about how ideology empowers some individual positions. For instance, the narrator's position enables him to expose his perception of each character's situation. He is also a character and the main focalizer. The power of his rhetoric determines judgments upon the characters which appear disguised as common sense. In this thesis, the novel is considered a cultural artifact, which sustains a web of ideological effects. The spatial division, in the novel, distinguishes settings which are mutually constituted, functional.

A literary text is not a transparent surface through which we may discern its non-textual origin. Instead, it contains levels of enunciation, one carrying the other, in an apparently coherent relation of metonymic expression. That is why my aim is to expand the understanding of its codes of meaning. My methodology of approaching the novel combines concepts and practice. It is descriptive and interpretative, based on close textual reading, with the support of theoretical assumptions from Feminist Criticism and Cultural Studies. There is no specific chapter for theoretical assumptions because they are intrinsically linked to the practice.

Why do I consider *The Great Gatsby* as a suitable example of ideological persuasion in literature? What is it in the novel that fulfills my fantasy and what is there that does not fit? Why does it disquiet me? How does it crystallize values? In which way can it be classified as a national allegory? What does it have to do with our contemporary perspectives as Brazilian students of literature? These are some of the questions I plan to answer during this dissertation.

My choice of analysis fell upon this specific novel because there is a parallelism between Gatsby's story and the history of immigrants, of the first and later settlers of the United States of America. Besides this, the spirit of hope, illusion, and frustration was the official connection between a national past experience of migration and Fitzgerald's actual context- the post World War I period. Fitzgerald's allegorical method, as will be seen here, may be described as a way of focusing and combining a wide range of abstract considerations- religious, metaphysical, social, and moral, besides the representation of a

love affair between a man and his desired object: a woman. Furthermore, the novel raises questions that are related to the representation of my own experience as a woman, mother, wife, German immigrant descendent, and Brazilian graduate student of literature.

Having in mind that each individual speaks from his/her particular place², carrying a historical background, I decided to describe my own position as a reader. It is for sure not an unchanging, nor fixed position, but one articulated by discourses that surround me. For instance, the belief that we are all ethnically located and that one's ethnic identity³ is crucial to one's subjective sense of who he/she is, makes me feel the need to tell of the difficulty I have faced since childhood to create an ethnic identity. I grew up in a rural village, inhabited by German immigrants, who settled there in the post-war period. This village is located in the Central-depression of Rio Grande do Sul. The first books I read made me face the barriers of the German dialect I had learned at home: some phonetic sounds were indistinguishable to me. When I realized the language I spoke at home was not Portuguese, nor even German, I felt the distinction of being between cultures whose characteristics were not clearly defined. Only by leaving that provincial community did I realize how strict it was in terms of values, how it was linked to the colonial past and how it was struggling to maintain control of everyone's behavior and thoughts. Leaving this community to enter a boarding school was an extension of the experience of being forced to belong to a place, working for a system. As it was a school destined to rural students, one of its aims was to maintain the students connected to the rural environment through activities which would prepare them to interact in their places of origin. As incongruities were silenced and all those who did not fit in were sent home to "plant potatoes", as my father used to say, the only acceptable destiny was to stay there, conform, and be quiet. But outside the school walls, the city's promise of exotic adventures and liberties was closer than ever, and it would not be forever neglected. But, entrance to city life had a price.

As I was the only female child in my family, I grew up surrounded by a moral demand: personal struggle for social ascendance. Coherence, patience, investment in only one objective, attention for opportunities, competition, individualism were the ingredients to become a self-made person, not because of a gift, but because of a sense of achieving a better place in society.

² Place is considered here as a *space of interaction* in which local identities are constructed (MASSEY, 1994, p.151).

³ Identity is here considered as an unstable position, a historic-discursive space constituted within a particular time and space (Ibidem).

Soon I realized that no matter how hard I worked, it was never good enough to make my parents feel proud of me. It took me long years to realize that my “failure” was a biological one: I was not the boy elected to fulfill my parents’ expectations, mostly my father ones. So I believed I belonged to the wrong sex, the weak one. As I could not change this, and would not, I learnt to be quiet, and patient, which was strongly recommended. I went to a boarding school to avoid conflicts at home, to see how I should behave to be a good daughter, but instead, it widened the gap between my parents and I. Feelings of dislocation, besides lack of financial conditions led me to look for a “place called home” somewhere else, as in Porto Alegre, for instance. But I could not come and stay in the city alone, it would be too risky without a husband. And I believed in the security of this connection. Having a husband was having a guide.

My experience is also the experience of many others, who left their provincial cities or rural villages to enrich their life possibilities in larger urban cities, and ended up in suburbs. Life is not so easy as the advertisements show. We are caught by its seductive power, and also trapped by it.

The narrative I selected is much more related to my parents’ conception about life, than my own. In this sense, this dissertation is also an opportunity to study the source of values that my generation consciously rejected, although pragmatically still maintains the tie with. I am speaking about patriarchal ideological⁴ conceptions. They reinforce gender, racial, and class boundaries, which I plan to investigate in the novel.

A personal experience seems to have much wider implications. It can be- in a greater scale- a re-inscription of a national or continental past experience of migration. Ambiguities of that shift from Europe to America resulted in America’s ambivalent relationship to European culture and the ambiguity of America’s relationship to its own internal ethnic diversity and hierarchies. I feel the need to study this process of identity construction and the selected novel provides this opportunity. It represents a symbolical organization of this migration experience and it instigates us, readers, to question the stability of place- identities.

⁴ Ideology is considered here in terms of *ideological practices*, through which particular chains of equivalencies are fixed together. They construct the reality of particular identifications and interpretations and the simultaneous exclusion of others. Ideology is the naturalization of a particular historical cultural articulation. It created the common sense, in which particular social practices and relations with particular structures of meaning fix them in a structure in which their relations onto social identity, political interest have already been divided and seem inevitable. Ideological struggles are never wholly autonomous; they are themselves located within, articulated with a broader field of economical, cultural and ideological struggles. Ideological practices produce real effects in the social formation (HALL, 1996).

My reading of the novel has been inspired by my search for private answers that became political ones like: Why did I love the novel so much since I first read it during my undergraduate course? How has my perception about it changed since I began pursuing graduate readings on Gender and Cultural Studies ?

An atmosphere of mystery and intense life surrounds the seductive main character - Gatsby. He maintains us- female readers- subjugated. While the female reader looks for identification with him, she fails to perceive the universe of difference between the male hero and the singularity of her experience. She is required to identify against herself.

The Great Gatsby fascinated me, when I read it during my graduation, for its capacity of synthesis. It presents society organized in three levels: the poor, the middle class and the rich. Each one deserves a specific geographic place and individuals fight in order to advance the social scale. The idea of a *syntheses* is provoked due to the effect of metaphors, metonymies and a scarce number of episodes articulated in the novel and filtered by the narrator's perception. He considers them subjectively, creating a parallel world which seems to melt in the air. Characters are more important than facts. They are judged by the narrator based on a pastoral imagery linked to bourgeois values.

We need to take into consideration that conceiving the novel as a synthesis of social life is a reductionist idea. Contradictions and gaps, as well as representations of gender, class, ethnicity and race need to be considered as conflicting elements linked to a specific context of production. For instance, the readers' suggestive identification with the hero draws my attention to the novel as part of a project of socio-historical reductionism, in which the male, middle class hero represents a universal position. Another example is that the novel's rhetoric teaches us- readers - to classify a poor suburb that grows around a huge factory as a 'valley of ashes'. In this sense, I could say 'Ash -children' knock on my door nearly everyday asking, first for food, then for toys. By accepting them as "ashes" we try to pretend they do not exist as human beings. This idea of alienation, immobility, and frustration serves to maintain the system which created this "ash -people idea." This is what I call social reductionism: the belief that the world is a fully comprehensible system, in which everyone occupies the position that he or she deserves in order to make the social machine move. This system can be assimilated through literature, but the excesses of the norm are still there disguised.

The Great Gatsby is a Western story which universalizes and legitimates a particular experience, by considering it as "The" experience of a nation, which can be extended to other South- American nations. The narrative is focalized by a single narrator

which uses a retrospective narrative mode, suggestive of his longing for an idealized past. The narrative is connected to a national ideal in such a subtle way that, when the novel ends, the reader feels a kind of emotional commitment to the hero and his historical idealized dream. After first reading the novel, *hero*, *nation*, *women* and *failure* were the words that lingered in my mind. Insofar as the hero's story is narrated as personal, he embodies a collective dimension by incorporating a mythic national ideal which crashes against the values of a materialistic society. His dependence upon a woman is described as a failure. It suggests that she is connected to the collapse of the male Western world. Thus, the novel engenders a chain of metaphors which inscribe it into our discourses, according to our culture⁵. The characters' destiny seems to be already determined by history- the history of decadence of the values of the American Dream. The implications of the novel upon gender, class, race, and ethnicity reinforce an idea of universal validity. It universalizes a white, male, middle-class, local experience as a national model.

The author, Scott Fitzgerald along with Hemingway, Faulkner, Dos Passos, Lewis were called by Gertrude Stein "The Lost Generation". Many young people came out of World War I disillusioned and cynical about the world. Many writers of this generation, such as Hemingway and Cummings moved to Paris. They considered themselves not disillusioned, but just not so optimistic about the American future as the previous generation of writers was. They represented, in fiction, the loss of American's idealism and the turn to the European capitalist model. But their subject was still American identity. They were conscious that their generation had lost the link between ethics and an economically profitable life and they questioned its roots in literary works. Their political beliefs were libertarian and individualistic rather than liberal. How much this generation influenced the manner of the twenties or was influenced by them is impossible to assess. The fact is that, until the end of World War I, the United States was a provincial nation. In this period, most Americans thought only Europeans could write significant books. Then, during the twenties, writers such as the ones mentioned turned their eyes to their American domestic- life experience. What they saw was the collapse of the American Dream. They realized the gap between ideological and practical possibilities of success for a country whose economic development was running faster than its moral ideology could sustain.

⁵ Culture is the struggle over meaning to define how life is lived and experienced, a struggle carried out in the discursive forms available to us. Culture defines the way we make sense of social practices. Practices do not belong to any political positions or social identity. They must be articulated into it" (HALL,1996, p. 158).

Fitzgerald's novels belong to the "Jazz Age" as the 1920s were called. Jazz became associated with modernity, sophistication and also decadence. His novels demystify the United States' idealized society, presenting the impulse to achieve economic stability –status and the drudgery in which many were entrapped. By conceiving characters as the millionaire Tom Buchanan and his wife Daisy, he presents the female figure trapped by an image of ideal marriage and the male figure fighting to maintain everyone in his or her original social position. According to Tom's discourse, this position is determined by birth. It is based on a hierarchical sense of social belongingness. This character embodies the model of Imperialism. "The conventional model of cultural imperialism presumes the existence of a pure, homogeneous, authentic culture, which becomes *corrupted* by *foreign influence* (HANDLEY, 2002, p.8). Gatsby, Tom's antagonist, represents this *foreign influence*. He is the young millionaire who hides the origin of his fortune as a bootlegger, and whose aim is "to repeat the past" by correcting what he considers a social mistake: his humble origin. On the other side of the social scale, there are George Wilson and his wife Myrtle, who is actually Tom's mistress. They live in a wasteland, mid-way between the mansions on Long Island and New York City. Among the ones who look for social ascension, there are Gatsby, Myrtle and the narrator Nick - a bourgeois middle-class person. In the novel's universe of representation, members of distinct classes occupying distinct spaces in U.S.A. geography is described as conflicting. Besides, Fitzgerald presents the conflicting relation between distinct genders in domestic life, which ends up in tragedy as a consequence of misunderstandings and vengeance. Scenes of domestic discord and violence appear as evidence of a white male dominant culture denouncing female rebellion. According to Handley Williams, "Americans turned their violence against each other, fighting for class mobility and, on a subtle level, trying to explain in fiction their domestic disappointments" (HANDLEY, 2002, p.198).

In this sense, I consider there is a mutually constitutive relation between literary form and literary content; esthetics and ideology; representation and reality. Though we are convinced by proof, we are even more susceptible to the language of pleasure and of seduction. "What is truth and what is desirable do not ever coincide and the knowledge of the one and the awareness of the other wage a combat of which the outcome is very uncertain", says Paul de Man (GREENBLATT, 1981, p.4). What we learn emotionally through literature is easily accepted by our own fantasy. Moreover, the fictional world that delights our senses rules our attitudes, even without our conscious consent. In this sense, literature provides the occasion for individuals (readers) to re-experience their personal failures and, at the same

time, it is an opportunity to analyze these *failures*: What do they represent? How are they constructed in our imagery? They are *failures*, for whom? For how long? In which discursive context? Whose interests do they help to preserve? Literature is used to articulate decisions and judgments throughout a rhetorical and esthetical mode. That is why literature as art is so dangerous and enlightening. Literature is an experience of struggle, in which subjectivity and politics stay together. We, readers, have the chance to participate in the fight of others: imaginary characters. But who are these “others”? In which sense do they tell us who we are? I mean, in which sense do they represent our imaginary understanding of our own identity? Insofar as they tell us where it is or where our possible places in society can be, they tell us what we should dream about and which place we should fight to occupy. It is impossible to precise to what extent society is an illusory result of the variety of stories we listen to, we read, and we see day by day. Where should our place be, as readers of literature, within this society?

Literature presents a social, cultural, gender and political dimension. For many years I believed in literature as a coherent representation of social struggles and hierarchies. I believed the fantastic universe of literature could give me the chance to challenge reality. The moment I started to suspect the effects the books I read had upon my perception of the reality that surrounded me, I felt the need to study further the implications of representation. What Roland Barthes called “the pleasure of the text” was guiding my understanding of “social reality”. Literature was a way of experiencing pleasure without living it, and all those gaps, silences and unanswerable questions I found in literature made me suspect the linguistic capability of representing “reality”. I have had the opportunity of studying German, English and Portuguese, but I could still feel the gap of words, the existence of more meanings than words dare represent. And, in this sense, who has the right to say what a word does represent? How many possible meanings can it carry? How can we define the meaning of a work of art if it carries distinct meanings for distinct audiences? Is it only the context which determines meaning?

Cultural Studies operate with the idea of there being different possible readings of particular texts, which depend largely on the experience of the audiences. Ethnicity, gender, race and class are constructed historically, culturally and politically also in texts. Cultural Studies conceive literature as a social practice that does not deny its dialogue with other areas of study. It enables one to observe paradigms which maintain a national identity based on a symbolic totalization that covers class, gender and race belongingness. Studying cultural

differences, in this sense, is not only reporting them but interfering, questioning, interacting in the process of identity formation. The belief is that we are configured and controlled based on a cultural set of limited possibilities. Social, economic, historical perceptions of the world interfere in our choices. If we are subjugated to a cultural system, it means that representation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time. There is the belief that it is only within discourse that meaning can be constructed. So, one of the proposals of this dissertation is to re-read and revise canonic values marked in the novel in order to point out how characters are constituted as subjects based on cultural models.

Feminist Studies also provide critical tools to study the text's contradictions. There are two main approaches for Feminist criticism. One is re-reading the tradition, reinterpreting the construction of masculinity and femininity. The other emphasizes the study of texts written by women. My aim in this thesis is the first one. It does not mean to undermine the novel, but instead, to present an interpretation of it based on contemporary values, which suggest that the esthetically great literary text uses a patriarchal world of representation in order to achieve various levels of meaning. Feminism develops theories of sexual difference in reading, writing and literary interpretation. It draws connections between literature and life noting incongruities between the identifications and ambitions that are presented by literature as attractive. From Feminism, I consider that all social practices and forms of domination are always inscribed in sexual identity and positioning. Gender is conceived as a linguistic effect, a system which leads subjects to determined behaviors. It is the representation of a relation of belongingness to a specific group or category. In the novel, political and economic facts interfere in the representation of gender associated with sex (masculine/feminine). In this sense, the construction of class, race and ethnicity is also studied in relation to gender.

My choice upon a canonical novel rests, finally, on the belief that there is a need to recover the voices of "the others" in canonic literary writings- the voice of secondary characters, of the ones about whom the main characters speak. Historically this "other" has been related to women, to the savage, to nature, to the metaphysical, to the unconscious, and, finally, to what is unknown. I will observe how the formal organization of the text provides a seductive discourse which favors only one voice, one ideological perspective that becomes allegorical when it reaches the extra-diegetic universe. Allegory begins with a structure. At each point of its progress in the novel, it selects its signifying elements from the system of binary oppositions that is provided by what Jakobson (1966) called "the metaphoric code",

that is, the structure. As a result, allegory will “reinforce the structurality of that structure. It is an indicative of timeless order. It is a political and religious trope, an effect of language” (FINEMAN, 1981, p. 32). A further study about the concept of allegory takes place in the third chapter of this dissertation.

I organized this work in three chapters. In the first I will analyze the main couples: Nick and Jordan, Gatsby and Daisy, Daisy and Tom, Tom with Myrtle, Myrtle with George Wilson and, finally, Nick’s sexist judgements. I will investigate the representation of masculinity and femininity in the novel, and how the narrator’s different expectations in relation to male and female characters take place from the point of view of gender identity and gender relations. To this extent, I draw from Judith Fetterley’s study of the novel in *The Resisting Reader* (1977), Stuart Hall’s conception of multiple identities: “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past” (HALL, 1993, p. 394), and Teresa de Lauretis’s conception of “gender” to guide the analysis. Lauretis emphasizes the distinction between sex as biologically determined and gender as cultural acquired identity. Gender is considered the “representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual. It is predicated on the conceptual and rigid opposition of two biological sexes” (LAURETIS, 1987, p.5). Doreen Massey’s book *Space, Place and Gender* (1994) will be used to trace links between geographical space and gender identity in the novel. The division of *space* leads to struggle and conquest between subject-positions. In this sense, a space is unfixed and unstable, constructed by a variety of discourses temporarily intersected. This chapter will put side by side different identity formations based on the relations between the couples and Nick’s perspective. This identity construction leads to other social divisions: race, ethnicity and class.

The second chapter provides a study of the relation between the categories: space, race, ethnicity and social class. Space polarities as West and East; New York and the Valley of Ashes, the urban and the provincial will be analyzed as settings of semantic field which link metonymically the physical/ geographical signified to a wider range of meaning. The names of the places represented in the novel carry an idea of place that goes beyond their geographic reference. Racial prejudice will be analyzed in relation to ethnic nationalism, as the symbol of the colors “white” and “yellow”, representing, respectively, *purity* and *corruption*. The novel’s hints about immigrants and the presence of other ethnic groups in America will receive attention. Inquires will be made about migration as a matter of choice or

necessity, besides its relation to social class. The sources of Fitzgerald's pastoral ideas, presented in the novel, and its balance with bourgeoisie pragmatic values, as the value of money, will be observed. Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) will be used, as it presents the American pastoral ideas in conflict with the Modern Era of industrialization. The point is to observe the novel's representation of a bourgeois society's economic success, in contrast to the world of spiritual "emptiness" this society was producing. Gatsby's visionary "garden" holds the idea of provisional reconciliation between the spiritual belief and the material world. The damage caused by technology invading the Edenic garden seems to represent a fatal loss of human experience of totalization. But the question is: Who wishes this kind of totalization?

The two former chapters converge into the third, the aim of which is to show how the retrospective mode of narration leads to an allegorical⁶ projection inscribing the categories of gender, race, ethnicity and class as timeless repetitions of a pattern related to the American Dream. Its future is placed in the past due to an allegorical mode of expression which represents a view of a contradictory American identity moving in time, but repeating itself. Richard Chase's notion of romance⁷ developed in *The Novel and its Tradition* (1983) will be used to explain how elements of romance appear in the novel and allow one to read it as an allegory. According to Chase, *The Great Gatsby* is classified as a novel of manners⁸ in which there are characteristics of romance and reality⁹ mixed. Walter Benjamin conceptualized allegory as a structural repetition – the image projection of a struggle between conflicting forces for the probing of hidden meanings. Besides this, the Benjaminian concept of allegory

⁶ *Allegory* is understood as an extended metaphor, since it is a representation conveying a meaning other than the literal meaning. *Metaphor* is based on a combination of two Greek words meaning 'to carry over' or 'to carry across'. It is a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea used in the place of another by way of suggesting a likeness or analogy between them. The metaphor has at least two fixed meanings: the literal and the other that it stands for or suggests (MURRAY, 1978, p. 83). Allegory is considered a rhetorical mode to incorporate myths, linking a personal perspective to a politic-ideological position. When it works in favor of one, it helps to legitimize the other (BERCOVITCH, 1986, p. 290).

⁷ Romance is characterized by the tendency toward melodrama, idyll, abstractness. It expresses a wish to fly away from actuality and to formulate moral truths of universal validity. It expresses dark and complex truths. The action is more important than characters, who are involved by mystery in relation to their origins. They share abstract and symbolic emotions, their social class is not emphasized. Astonishing events have symbolic or ideological rather than realistic plausibility, so it veers toward mythic, allegorical and symbolic forms (CHASE, 1983, p. 15).

⁸ The novel of manners is characterized by the presence of characters whose attitudes, gestures and conventional responses belong to a certain time, class or school of thought. If the individual present aberrations, they may be destroyed or he will be expelled by society. The moral judgment will be the one of common sense. The manners are indistinguishable for the lower class which is always middle-class itself. An American novel of manners is also a romance with inner tension and dramatic power (Idem, p. 16).

⁹ Reality is considered the among of things we cannot possible not know, while romance are the things that we can not directly know because they reach us through thought and desire (Ibidem, p.16).

presents modes of interpreting the relationships between Fitzgerald's literary expression and the elements that characterize the novel as an embodiment of a national experience.

Therefore, this chapter presents a reading of the novel's allegorical representation that links the categories of space, class, race and gender to an idea of time.¹⁰ It projects a national experience into a national identity, suggesting new directions for the American Dream. It links personal to political, private to public, sexuality to patriotism, the "love story" to wider ideological implications. Personal self-consciousness becomes indistinguishable from national self-consciousness. Finally, thoughts by Sacvan Bercovitch and Myra Jehlen in *Ideology and Classic American Literature* (1986) will be useful to the conclusion, which is always a provisional one.

¹⁰ Time is considered relative to each individual and measured by life experiences. To this extent, the novel's fragmentation of time will be analyzed as an ideological manipulation of narrative sequence. Jean Genette (1990) observed that narratives present a "doubly temporal sequence - the time of the signified and the time of the signifier. The first is the time of the thing told and the last is the time of the narration" (GENETTE, Jean, 1990 apud RITTER, 2002, p.15.).

2. Representation of Gender in *The Great Gatsby*

The characters conventionally assigned as *men* and *women*, in novels, reflect history and culture rather than nature. It was taken for granted that male character embodied the general human condition. His values were represented as inevitable rather than ideological. This reductionism covers the complexities of human difference. It is necessary to deconstruct the assumption that young men of the dominant class are universally representative.

By searching about the feminine identity in North-American literature, I found that critics like Judith Fetterley (1978) consider that the “major works of American fiction are designs on female reader, all the more potent in their effect because they are impalpable” (p.xi). Due to the apolitical pretense that literature speaks universal truths, only one reality is encouraged, legitimized and transmitted. In this patriarchal reality, men and women are almost incompatible and potentially murderous, because there are huge gaps in mutual understanding. And these gaps are mainly considered female faults.

Feminist Criticism is a political act whose aim is not to simply interpret the world, but change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read. One of its representatives is Judith Fetterley. In *The Resisting Reader*, she states:

Feminist criticism is a growing, changing, constantly self-transforming phenomena characterized by a resistance to codification and a refusal to be rigidly defined or to have its parameters prematurely set (1978, p.viii).

According to Fetterley, due to patriarchy and its cultural diffusion, women are deceived into believing the theory about a “bit of flesh”, which establishes that what characterizes women is an absence, something that men have and women do not. A biological difference is conceived as an ideological¹¹ one which is, by analogy, related to power in society.

Disinherited, cast out, women are the Other, the outsider, never really child because never allowed to be fully self-indulgent, never fully adult because never permitted to be fully responsible, sub-human[...] (FETTERLEY, 1978, p.ix).

¹¹ Ideology is conceived as an imaginary relation established by the individual about his/her real relations.

The result of this kind of differentiation is a negative self-image. Female experiences are “self-hatred and self-doubted” (FETTERLEY, 1978, p.xxii). Also as literary readers, women are invited to participate in an experience from which they are excluded as subjects. “Intellectually male, sexually female, in effect: no one, nowhere [...] Forced into every way to identify with men, yet incessantly reminded of being woman, she undergoes a transformation into an it” (Ibidem, p.xxii), which means an object of male usage.

Women are now realizing that the universal imposition of names by men has caused problems in understanding because it is partial. Inadequate words have been taken as adequate in a symbolic system in which the “name of the father” prevails. Fetterley mentions that “This drive for self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society” (p.xxii). We need to provide conditions to change the culture that literature creates and reflects. Feminist criticism provides that point of view and emphasizes that consciousness. The aim of this kind of literary criticism is to bring a different subjectivity on the old universality, to make palpable the effects of patriarchal fiction.

Fetterley mentions that the first act of feminist criticism¹² must be to construct a resisting rather than an assenting reader, and by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted in female readers of literature. As Feminist Criticism leads to an analysis of the symbolic construction of gender and sexuality within literary discourse, there are two possible approaches for this criticism. It can emphasize new readings of the tradition and it can concentrate on recuperating women writers to the canon for literature. My aim is the first one: to enrich the understanding of what is going on in the novel from a gender perspective. To this extent, I checked the concept of “gender”.

According to the *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1968), gender means:

the formal classification by which nouns and pronouns (and often accompanying modifiers) are grouped and inflected, or changed in form, so as to control certain syntactic relationships: although gender is not a formal feature of English, some nouns and the third person singular pronouns are distinguished according to sex or the lack of sex (man or he, masculine gender; woman or she, feminine gender; door or it, neuter gender): in most Indo-European languages and in others, gender is not necessarily correlated with sex (p. 263).

¹² According to Elaine Showalter (1986), “English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytical, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All hope to rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority” (p.249).

Having this last specification in mind, we can argue that there is not necessarily a correspondence between *sex* and *gender*. Gender is a cultural idea rather than a biological fact. In the same way class, race, ethnicity or even nationality are socio-linguistic constructions. Gender establishes an imaginary relation which determines behaviors, judgments, hierarchies, and values. “It represents a relation of belonging to a class, a group, a category, which pre-exists the individual subject [...] It has the function of constituting real individuals into men and women” (LAURETIS, 1984, p. 20). Based on a cultural concept, human beings are classified as belonging to the feminine or masculine category, which inscribes them in a symbolical system of gender.

According to Teresa de Lauretis, “femininity and masculinity are not qualities or attributes but positions in the symbolic process of (self) – representation, [...] femininity is traditionally conceived as the underside of masculinity” (1984, p. 164). These positions are effects of a patriarchal discourse, in which women stand as the opposite of men, suppressing the distinction between *women* and *woman*. This last one represents an essentialist conception in which ideological and linguistic attributions of the word *woman* are inscribed in real women.

Catharine Mackinnon argues about the creation of femininity:

Socially, femaleness means femininity, which means attractiveness to men, which means sexual attractiveness, which means sexual availability on male terms... Good girls are ‘attractive’, bad girls ‘provocative’. Gender socialization is the process through which women come to identify themselves as sexual beings that exist *for men* [my emphasis]. It is that process through which women internalize (make their own) a male image of their sexuality as their identity as women (MACKINNON apud LAURETIS , 1984, p. 166).

The Great Gatsby, as most famous modern famous narratives, is conceived in a Oedipus model¹³, in which there are two positions of a sexual difference: male-hero-human as the subject and female-obstacle-boundary-space as the object. In this sense, the hero

crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing, he is constructed as human being and as male, he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinctions [...] Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter (LAURETIS, 1987, p. 119).

¹³ According to Teresa de Lauretis, in *Technologies of Gender*, all narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, represents the Oedipal logic- the inner necessity of an ending inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time (1987, p. 125).

Femininity is defined, in the novel, as based on sexual distinction, which establishes how, why, and what women are supposed to do. Masculinity is the equal and opposite condition. But what makes a difference is who judges these acts. The judgement comes from a male point of view. The narrator Nick is the one who classifies which acts are *good* and which are *bad*, whose acts are performed well by whom. According to Lauretis (1987), the pressure to collapse distinct orders of discourse into a single discourse suppresses contradictions. In this sense, Nick “looking from a single window” represents a male restrictive focus of enunciation.

In the novel, the construction of femininity and masculinity will be analyzed based on Nick’s distinct judgments upon the characters, their acts, beliefs, and behaviors. Besides this, the relations established among women, men and their gender interactions as characters leads us to inquire about the construction of their identity as one based on limitations of gender. In the novel, this category is conceived as a fix unchangeable one, and gender transgressions are not accepted without punishment, specially when women are the ones who try to subvert these pre-existed social borders. In sequence, I will observe the representation of gender and its antagonisms in the construction of femininity, in the novel, and then, the construction of masculinity, which is defined in opposition to femininity.

2. 1 Construction of Femininity: Nick’s glance at Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle

In the novel, men are the judges of femininity. When the narrator starts describing women they seem to be the incarnation of femininity. Daisy and Jordan are part of the setting in East Egg¹⁴. When Daisy is described for the first time she is associated with a mystic image, a queen, a ghost, or a butterfly who fluctuates. She and her friend Jordan are described together:

The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.14).

¹⁴ East Egg is the place in which the rich aristocratic live in the novel. On the other side, West Egg is for middle-class and the new riches- the bourgeoisie with money, but without a traditional family name.

As archetypal images of no substance, they seem to be interrupted on their flight when Tom enters the room. “Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor” (p.14). Jordan in particular is described first:

She was a stranger to me. She was extended full length at her end of the divan, completely motionless, and with her chin raised a little, as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall. If she saw me out of the corner of her eyes she gave no hint of it- indeed, I was almost surprised into murmuring an apology for having disturbed her by coming in (Ibidem, p.14).

Valdemar Ribeiro Filho (1991)¹⁵ explains that Jordan, a golf champion, symbolizes a new type of woman that was emerging in the twenties. “She is self-sufficient, she has little or no relationship with her family, she dresses the way she likes, she smokes, she drinks, and she has sex” (1991, p.44). But even Tom is incredulous of her capacity to do anything except lying on the sofa: “ ‘No, thanks,’ said Miss Baker to the four cocktails just in from the pantry. ‘I’m absolutely in training.’ Her host (Tom) looked at her incredulously. ‘You are!’ He took down his drink as if it were a drop in the bottom of a glass. ‘How you ever get anything done is beyond me’” (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.17).

In the same article, Ribeiro Filho mentions Jordan’s importance as a co-narrator. She tells Nick that Tom has a mistress in New York, so she supplies him with information he otherwise could not get. Because Jordan is rich she can move from East Egg to West Egg quite easily, thus being a kind of link between the two worlds. Nick establishes a relation of opposition between himself and Jordan, that can be seen as a parallel opposition between male and female, the West and the East society, as he belongs to middle class and she to high society. While he states about himself : “ I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known” (p. 66), she is described as [...] incurably dishonest. She wasn’t able to endure being at a disadvantage [...]” (Ibidem, p. 64).

According to Judith Fetterley (1978), Jordan occupies an advantaged position in relation to Nick. She belongs to the world he tries to enter. But since this world is presented as extremely corrupted, it is considered a trace of her personality. He does not trust her, as he

¹⁵ He is a professor of English Language and Literature at Universidade Federal de Uberlândia.

does not trust the East, nor the American Dream¹⁶, nor women either. They are conceived as a dangerous destroyers of morality in society.

Implicitly, she is the rich girl in the novel who no man really cares about. Her conduct is described as immoral, but what distinguishes her from Daisy is that her conduct is portrayed as masculinized, as her name suggests.

I looked at Miss Baker, wondering what it was she 'got done'. I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her gray sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a warm, charming, discontented face. It occurred to me now that I had seen her, or a picture of her, somewhere before (Ibidem, p.17).

By mentioning the link of Jordan's image to a young cadet and her masculine name, Nick makes the first great distinction between Daisy and Jordan. As the first one is the ideal object of male desire, in spite of being arrogant, the second's pride links her to male haughtiness. Besides this, male desire is described as dependent on the existence of an impediment, which could be a third character preventing the lovers from being together. But instead, Nick describes how she is "easy to get". According to his perceptions and moral principles, she did not deserve his love from the beginning. Women, in the novel, play a losing game. According to his skepticism, no woman in the world deserves him, and he returns to West, alone, at the end of the novel.

Right after the beginning of the narrative, on their first meeting at Tom's house, Nick expresses his antipathy for Daisy's disdainful attitude. He describes her in a mocking way, connecting the girl's behavior to a kind of feigning:

The other girl, Daisy, made an attempt to rise- she leaned slightly forward with a conscientious expression- then she laughed, an absurd, charming little laugh, and I laughed too and came forward into the room.(Ibidem,p.15)

As he laughs too, he symbolically accepts to participate in this feigning. And then Daisy says: "I'm p-paralyzed with happiness." As he considers himself as the one who is paralyzed and who occupies a disadvantaged position, he feels as if she were sarcastically trying to bring him to her side. And he adds that her face was "promising that there was no

¹⁶ The American Dream refers to a belief in individual courage, persistence and determination focused on idealism. It is derived from the Puritan tradition, from the myth of an egalitarian society in America, which is divinely ordained, based on moral principles and economic progress.

one in the world she so much wanted to see” (p.15). Then, he emphasizes Daisy’s effort to occupy an advantaged position in relation to him:

I’ve heard it said that Daisy’s murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming [...] a bright passionate mouth, but there was an excitement in her voice that men who had cared for her found difficult to forget: a singing compulsion, a whispering “listen”, a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour (Ibidem, p.15).

Nick feels as if he were an invader of the women’s holy place: “Again a sort of apology arose to my lips. Almost any exhibition of complete self-sufficiency draws a stunned tribute from me” (p. 15). His anger against what he considers a female, high-class feigning code of conduct arises from his irony. Self-sufficiency in a woman is unforgiving. But, it is a demand on men, as Nick’s disapproval of Gatsby’s dependence upon Daisy will present.

When women obtain an advantage, Nick articulates a punishment. He allows other men, from the upper class such as Tom, to get an advantage over his male friend Gatsby. But a women taking advantage will not be forgiven.

When Daisy and Gatsby drive to the city, she shouts to her husband Tom: “ ‘We’ll meet you on some corner. I’ll be *the man* smoking *two* cigarettes’ ” (p. 131, italics mine). This sentence seems odd, till we observe its figurative meaning. Men and women are supposed to assume different positions facing similar situations. Daisy, the embodiment of the ideal female figure, calls herself “the man” because by having a lover (Gatsby) and a husband (Tom), she identifies herself with a male position. The “two cigarettes” stand for Gatsby and Tom. The husband’s response to Daisy’s comment is: “We can’t argue about it here [...]” (p. 131). For him, this kind of discussion should be kept in private. Sexuality, in this sense, should remain a private issue, not a public one. Here we have a male position trying to avoid his humiliation for losing control over his wife’s behavior. Daisy’s attitude is represented as part of a masculine design and Tom is the man in charge of making her return to her female position. The narrative provides a punishment for Daisy’s audacity. In the subsequent scene, she is described as non- responsible for her acts. As Tom says: “The trouble is that sometimes she gets foolish ideas in her head and doesn’t know what she’s doing” . Thus, he brings her back to her female position by representing her as the object to which he directs his love. “Once in a while I go off on a spree and make a fool of myself, but I always come back, and in my heart I love her all the time” (p. 138). As he confesses he loves her, his behavior seems to be justified. The only possible position she can maintain is the one in which she is the

object of male choice. She feels the pressure: she should be glad that he still accepts her back after her gender transgression. Tom tells her what to do: “It doesn’t matter any more. Just tell him the truth- that you never loved him- and it’s all wiped out forever”(p. 138). After that, Nick judges her as repentant and irresponsible by saying: “She hesitated. Her eyes fell on Jordan and me with a sort of appeal, as though she realized at last what she was doing- and as though she had never, all along, intended doing anything at all, but it was done. It was too late” (p. 138). Incapable of sustaining her position, her attitude of exposing her affair with Gatsby was classified as an attitude of female vengeance upon her husband’s infidelity. Being qualified as careless by Nick, it is not difficult to presume she would end up accepting her husband’s protection. After all, according to Nick, she was not aware of what she was doing. So she was allowed to return safe and sound to her position as Tom’s wife.

In the novel, the performance of femininity includes observing more shrewdly the performance of gender. Daisy’s act is qualified as a gender subversion. Right after, Tom manages to put her again in her place. And she appears so stupid for having tried to occupy a male position because she can not sustain it. This is explained by Nick as an example of her imprudent behavior. In the narrative, there is no move into a new social identity. There is only rebelliousness and subsequent regret. Implicitly, the girl’s only possible wish is to look for a position of security beside a man. In Nick’s opinion, Daisy is a whore, while Gatsby considers her an angel, no matter how she performs and what her behavior means to others. Nick’s perspective prevails. The narrative seems to work in order to prove that the ‘angel’ is a ‘whore’, which means, she uses her attractiveness as a weapon to blind men. She is conceived as dangerous and Nick manages to prove it throughout the construction of gender in the narrative.

Fitzgerald presents this double standard ironically, one that judges men and women differently through Nick. The author seems to take “revenge” on female subjects by presenting Nick, who refuses to accept Jordan. On the other hand, Gatsby is redeemed from all his dishonest past, because, being a man, he has the right to fight for his dreams no matter how deeply he may need to be dishonest. The same personality trace that is great in Gatsby is disgusting in the women who Nick presents.

By observing the narrative sequence, we can point to a line of descriptions of identity. First, Nick, describing himself, mentions the importance of his father’s advice, which provides him with a male identity. After that, he describes himself in opposition to Gatsby, and in opposition to Tom, creating an individual sense of himself as subject. When he

describes women, they are a category, caricatured. He distinguishes Jordan from Daisy, but he never fully separates them. When one acts, he judges both. The two women remain as one for him: the fearful dishonest desired high-class women.

The ladies are as cool as “the white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire”(p.19). It is implicit that they do not need to desire anything because they have everything they could desire. They live to “entertain and to be entertained” (p.19). They do not have a aim to fight for, nor do they seem to need anyone in Nick’s narrative. This aspect distinguishes the high-class ladies, with their predictable and secure future, from the lower class woman that will be described next.

On the other side of the social scale, there is Myrtle. According to the narrative, she belongs to the Valley of Ashes, a poor suburb. Myrtle is George Wilson’s wife and Tom’s mistress. George runs a garage in the Valley of Ashes. The narrator describes her as:

the ticklish figure of a woman blocked out the light from the office door. She was in the middle thirties, and faintly stout, but she carried her flesh sensuously as some women can. Her face, above a spotted dress of dark blue crêpe-de-chine, contained no face or gleam of beauty, but there was an immediately perceptible vitality about her... she walked through her husband (Mr. Wilson) as if he were a ghost, shook hands with Tom, looking him flush in the eye (Ibidem,p.31).

Nick clearly describes the authoritative position each one occupies in the scene. The woman orders her husband to get some chairs so that they can sit down. He immediately obeys her. Then Tom orders: “ ‘I want to see you’. ‘Get on the next train” (p.32). And he refers to Wilson when he says: “He thinks she goes to see her sister in New York. He’s so dumb he doesn’t know he’s alive” (p.32).

The description of Myrtle puts in evidence her extreme vitality, one that would not be stored in a Valley of Ashes, and she will be punished exactly because of that. According to the narrative, vitality in a woman is condemned. She is described as opposed to her husband’s passivity. She is cheeky, provocative and it embarrasses Nick. “I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (p.42). She is not allowed to occupy two distinct positions: being one man’s wife and another man’s lover.

Myrtle suffers violence in New York and in the Valley of Ashes, which represents a waste land, a place in between, where everything can happen. Violence expressed against her is conceived as a consequence of her behavior and it is associated to her social position. When she crosses moral boundaries and “expands” herself, the settings seem to provide a reaction:

Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment, and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her, until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air (*Ibidem*, p.36).

Suggestively, there is no place for her. After Myrtle's death, only her body is mentioned. Nick actually only sees Wilson and his suffering. Myrtle is only a dead body, without a soul, without meaning. It had been an object for Tom's use, but now, it is useless:

Myrtle Wilson's body, wrapped in a blanket, ... then I saw Wilson, standing on the raised door of his office, swaying back and forth and holding to the door post with both hands... and he gave out incessantly his high, horrible call: 'Oh, my Ga-od!' (p.145).

Wilson's neighbor, called Michaelis, explains the circumstances of Myrtle's death. He says she and her husband had an argument and he locked her in his house. And she shouted: "'Beat me!' He heard her cry, 'Throw me down and beat me, you dirty little coward!'" (p.143). Then she rushed out in direction of the road, waving her hands and shouting. The next moment a car ran over her. The description of the scene suggests that she was not a victim, but responsible for what happened because her vitality seems to attract violence. She is described as a woman who was expecting an intense act of violence against herself. And her body is finally described as disgusting:

When they had torn open her shirtwaist, still damp with perspiration, they saw that her left breast was swinging loose like a flap, and there was no need to listen for the heart beneath. The mouth was wide open and ripped a little at the corners, as though she had choked a little in giving up the tremendous vitality she had stored so long (p.144).

We do not even remember Myrtle in the end. When the policeman, right after her death, interrogated people about the name of the place, people answered: "Hasn't got any name" (p.146). As the narrator calls it, the Valley of Ashes is a desolate area, "half-way between West Egg and New York" (p.29). Myrtle's life and death was placed nowhere, so we see her insignificance. She is only an object used to provide a chain of events which culminates with the hero's physical death and consequently, his metaphysical and mythical expansion.

Myrtle is punished for trying to cross the boundaries of poverty and of gender. It is a nostalgic view of a woman's place and also a strategy used for blaming the victim for her own misfortune. What is made evident is that she was married and that she betrayed her "dump" husband. In this patriarchal discourse, she wished too much for herself. When she dies, by a supposed car accident, the only one who suffers is her husband. The narrative is constructed

in a way in which the reader only pities him. And she is condemned again for provoking his unfair suffering, because it is evident that Nick considers she does not deserve her husband's love. She was not allowed to escape from him, nor from the poverty he represents. She seems to deserve no affection. "... and Myrtle Wilson's tragic achievement was forgotten..." (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.162).

2.2. Construction of Masculinity: Nick's glance at George, Tom, Gatsby and Himself

By comparing Myrtle and her husband George Wilson, the narrative emphasizes that the husband did not deserve a disloyal wife, since he was an honest man, working at his garage. Nick presents how unfair Myrtle was with her husband describing how he dedicated himself integrally to her:

Wilson had no friend: there was not enough of him for his wife [...] Wilson's glazed eyes turned out to the ash heaps, [...] 'I spoke to her', he muttered, after a long silence. 'I told her she might fool me but she couldn't fool God' (Ibidem, p.166).

As settings are used to determine characters, the description of Wilson's garage leads to a further analysis of his personality:

The interior was unprosperous and bare; the only car visible was the dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner... when the proprietor himself appeared in the door of an office, wiping his hands on a piece of waste. He was a blond, spiritless man, anemic, and faintly handsome. When he saw us a damp gleam of hope sprang into his light blue eyes (p.31).

Everything in the garage is dark and gray, and the man is "yellow weak", humble and innocent, as the color of his eyes suggests. When he sees Tom, there is a slightest hope in his eyes because he was expecting to have a business deal with him. George is conceived as a victim of his wife and of the place in which they live.

This is a valley of ashes- a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke, and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air (p. 29).

George Wilson is contaminated by the environment, while his wife is not. He accepts the subordinated position that his life in the Valley of Ashes determines, while Myrtle does not. According to the narrative, a woman has no right to argue for a place in Tom's world, because she is just an object of use for him. Nevertheless, she cannot stand staying with George who is considered a loser in the social game. She has no chance to advance because she is a woman and she is married, which means that she already belongs to someone. And he, the owner, has lost control over her.

At the other side of the male social struggle, there are Tom, Gatsby and Nick. Their aim is to acquire or maintain a position in high-society. Borders of masculinity and femininity can be further studied in the novel, by considering what high class women represent for them, and how their past is important for the construction of their gender identity.

The novel starts with Nick telling us about the advice he received from his father:

“Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone” he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.”

He didn't say any more, but we've always been usually communicative in a reserved way, and I understood that he meant a great deal more than that. In consequence, I'm inclined to reserve all judgments [...] (FITZGERALD, p.7).

This father figure incorporates Nick into a code of behavior and traditional knowledge. Based on the nation's memory and authority, which his father represents, he is able to penetrate men's heart. Nick's intention is to explain that he only tells the story, while remaining in a neutral position. But, when the focus is gender, he posits himself in a strictly male position. He presents it, for instance, when he speaks about Daisy and Tom: “I had no sight in to Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would ...” (p. 12). Otherwise, according to Judith Fetterley in her book *The Resisting Reader* (1978), the father's advice seems to open up areas of tolerance for those who are less advantaged, but it also creates in Nick an immense anger at those who seem more advantaged. As a result, he considers that “... for the intimate revelations of young men, or at least, the terms in which they express them are usually plagiarist and marred by obvious suppressions” (FITZGERALD, p.7). As soon as we begin to doubt Nick's tolerance, and reliability – because he describes men's expression as plagiarist and he is also a man- we begin to suspect his initial self-presentation and his identification with Gatsby. Both are presented as disadvantaged social outsiders. Mainly in relation to gender, Nick cannot stand being in disadvantage.

Relations of father and son, of male-companions like Nick and Gatsby, are relations of connivance. The novel is conceived in a patriarchal system, in which there is already a gender pre-disposition for them to be in advantage, at least, in relation to women. The novel can be considered as a male struggle for power. Women are conceived as tools and also as impediments to male projects. Nick exposes his restricted point of view based on his Middle-west male perspective as follows: “ I become again that most limited of all specialists, the ‘well-rounded man’[...] life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all” (p.10). But outside the Middle-West, Nick feels he is in disadvantage. This can be seen by the contrast of his twelve lemon cakes, he provided for Gatsby’s meeting with Daisy and the elegance of her home, complete with a butler. And Nick confesses, “You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy” (p.13).

From this point of view, the narrative is a vengeance upon high-class women, the ones who Nick cannot stand because they occupy what he considers an advantaged position in society. Nick tries to maintain the conventions and we realize how the novel of manners expresses the distinct classes’ code of behavior in society. In almost every instance of social interaction, Nick appears to be out of place and uncomfortable. He can not stand that his Middle-West background is awkward for the high East society he hopes to enter.

Fetterley explains how the connection between Nick’s sense of disadvantage and his identification with Gatsby is made explicit. Nick first mentions Gatsby saying: “Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn [...]” and later on he says: “Gatsby turned out all right at the end”(p.8). These quotations present Gatsby as a projection of what Nick dislikes, but he works to reconcile himself with his friend. Throughout the narrative, Nick tries to prove his point of view: that Gatsby’s connection with Daisy is the reason of his downfall.

Observing the novel’s sequence, we can testify the relation of opposition between Gatsby and Tom. Gatsby is described as an archetypal figure. He has a gorgeous personality, a heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, a rare romantic readiness and explicitly, he looks for a woman in order to fulfill himself. On the other hand, Tom is his antagonist:

[...] a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty, with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner... shining arrogant eyes that established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward,... the enormous power of that body... a cruel body... His voice: a gruff husky tenor, added to the impression of fractiousness he conveyed (Ibidem, p.13).

In chapter VI, the identification between Nick and Gatsby in opposition to Tom's rude personality is made explicit. Nick, returning from New York, goes to visit Gatsby: "[...] finally I went over to this house one Sunday afternoon when a casual attendant at one of Gatsby's parties brought Tom Buchman in for a drink" (p.108).

When Nick, Tom and his friend Mrs. Sloane visit Gatsby, he invites them over for dinner. But since Tom and his friend would not stay so long there, Mrs. Sloane politely invites Gatsby and Nick to go with them to have dinner at her house. It is obviously just a cordial invitation, not a serious one. Nick understands it and makes an excuse, but Gatsby actually believes they are inviting him to go with them. Since the guests arrived there riding horses and Gatsby has no horse, it is a hint for him to refuse the invitation, but he tells them he can follow them by car. When he goes upstairs to change his clothes, the guests, with the exception of Nick, make an excuse and leave. In this sense, it is clear that Gatsby is an outsider and he is not welcome in upper society. The point of Nick's account is to record Gatsby's touching "readiness", the rudeness of Tom and his friends, and his own sense of outrage at Gatsby's humiliation.

Nick's fierceness is the result of identification with the "hero", the male figure, whose masculinity determines his right to fight for his dreams. While Tom is physically strong, Gatsby is described as persistent, Nick as honest, George as innocent and pure. They construct and recreate an image of masculinity in which they are allowed and even impelled to act in order to decide upon theirs and their female partner's lives.

2.3. Masculinity X Femininity: Nick's Distinct Judgments based on Gender

The narrator cannot stand the idea that Mrs. Sloane, despite her invitation, does not really want Gatsby to come to dinner. The narrative sequence establishes a parallel between this event and Nick's revelation that he also cannot stand the idea of himself trotting after Jordan. "Mostly I was in New York, trotting around with Jordan and trying to integrate myself with her senile aunt- but finally I went over his (Gatsby's) house one Sunday afternoon" (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.108). He feels at home, being with Gatsby. In taking on the stance of Gatsby's defender against the insults of the world ("I'll get somebody for you"), Nick is symbolically seeking to revenge his own sense of insult and adjusting the balance of power a

little. Nick feels as if what happens to Gatsby were happening to himself. His judgments of Daisy are also extended to Jordan. If one woman disappoints him, he takes revenge upon all of them. This is how he inscribes all women in the category of “woman”, defining their attributes as dangerous and negative for men.

Nick judges differently Gatsby and Daisy. One can see there is a gender distinction. While Gatsby’s wish of social mobility is disguised as a love directed towards a woman, Daisy’s wish for money is exposed and condemned. Nick is suspicious of Gatsby’s anxiety for money and a high position in society, and finally he discovers Gatsby’s “noble” intention. Superficially, Gatsby’s aim is Daisy’s love and her aim is revenge against Tom. In the narrative, women have no real choice. The social demands pressing on them are never fully analyzed. And it is for sure not the narrator’s intention.

Another moment in which he condemns women is when Gatsby tells his past experience with Dan Cody, the rich sailor which had been Gatsby’s tutor:

Cody was fifty years old then, a product of the Nevada silver fields, [...]. The transactions in Montana copper that made him many times a millionaire found him physically robust but on the average of soft-mindedness, and, suspecting this, an infinite number of women tried to separate him from his money[...]. Ella Kaye came on board one night in Boston and a week later Dan Cody inhospitably died (p. 106-107).

The captain died after the entrance of a woman in his life. Ella Kaye also managed to inherit all his money, which left Gatsby almost penniless again after his friend’s death. Nick understands this, but Gatsby does not:

He (Gatsby) never understood the legal device that was used against him, but what remained of the millions went intact to Ella Daye. He was left with his singularly appropriate education; the vague contour of Jay Gatsby had filled out to the substantiality of a man (p.107).

According to Judith Fetterley (1978), the nature of the connection that *The Great Gatsby* reveals between a male sense of disadvantage and attitudes toward women is perhaps best understood if we examine a comment Fitzgerald made in recording the profound effect on him of being a poor boy trying to win his rich girl, Zelda¹⁷: “I have never been able to stop thinking that at one time a sort of droit de seigneur¹⁸ might have been exercised to give one of

¹⁷ See references to Zelda, Scott Fitzgerald’s wife in appendix.

¹⁸ “droit de seigneur”. The supposed right of a feudal lord to have sexual relations with a vassal’s bride on her wedding night. Etymology: French: *droid*, right +*du*, of the +*seigneur*, lord of manor. This definition was taken from: MIFFIN, Houghton. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4. ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

them my girl.” (FITZGERALD, *The Crash-up*, 1945, p.77 apud FETTERLEY, 1978, p.83). The origin of this comment is the poor boy’s powerlessness. “When men invest women with the significance of their ultimate possessions, they make them the prime counters in their power games with each other” (FETTERLEY, 1978, p.83). And she points out that:

Thus, women, who have themselves no actual power, become symbolic of the power of moneyed men; and while the real enemy in the passage above is the writer’s ‘friend’ [Tom], it is the girl who becomes the repository for the animus of the disadvantaged male (FETTERLEY, 1978, p.83).

Nick explains that it is due to Daisy that Gatsby acquires an image of himself, of which position he wants to occupy in society. And as she is, for the hero, a static image in space and time, time will not change her. She has a symbolic exchange-value. She is money and *status*. Yet, Gatsby believes he can “turn back time” to have another chance to take her. She is his holy grail, the most meaningful object a man can acquire to show himself his effort is worthwhile. As Fetterley argues: “Both the sense of wonder and the sense of loss are associated with women, and women are the objects of the novel’s moral indignation just as they are the objects of its romanticism” (1978, p.73).

Daisy’s choice is between which kind of oppression she wishes to take. On the one hand, there is the subjection to a man that sees her as a holy grail, who needs her to consider himself a winner. He simply ignores that she had a past, wishes of her own, and even a child. On the other hand, she has a stable position, beside a man that is not so perfect, who even allows her to have an affair, as far as he has one too. It is even fashionable for Tom, because he has an opportunity to compete with another man, showing that he is the best in the end. He is so sure that he will not lose control over the situation because he is the strong, rich husband, the owner of stability – this position is extended to her and she would not dare lose it. Nick knows this from the beginning, and his narrative will prove it to Gatsby and to the readers.

Gatsby falls in love with Daisy because she is useful to him. But, “it was beyond her”. He loves what she represents. In this sense, his love affair was more intentional than casual. This becomes evident considering that Daisy was “the first nice girl he met” (p.154). Nick knows that Gatsby’s dream would crash, but he needs to tell it romantically in order to find a cause. And the cause, as he presents it, is Daisy’s betrayal, which ends up being considered nothing personal, just a female attitude. It increases his self-pity and evades the hero’s responsibility for his own dreams. In the end, she was officially responsible for his fall. Implicitly, we conclude that a woman’s function in society should be the acceptance to

occupy a position in a man's dream of success and follow him till the last consequences. But the patriarchal narrative presents that women cause trouble because they are insecure about choosing the right men to follow and they are incapable of accepting their established function in society. Women are conceived as ungrateful to men's love. In the next quotation, Gatsby's vision about his glorious future with Daisy is described. Let's consider a little further what Daisy represents for Gatsby:

Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees- he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life (p. 118).

Gatsby hopes to achieve the paradise with Daisy, but Nick says: "He could climb to it, if he climbed alone" (p.118). The first critics of Fitzgerald considered this quotation a proof of his inability to have a rational control over his literary work, because Gatsby was not supposed to be able to climb the social scale alone, but with Daisy. If we observe it closer, it is somewhat funny to realize that Daisy is represented by the *ladder*. She is not considered a person who stands next to Gatsby. She is only the way to achieve the place he wants. Later on, Nick explains his friend's hope.

It had gone beyond her, beyond everything. He had thrown himself into it (his romantic vision of personal success) with a creative passion, adding to it all the time, decking it out with every bright feather that drifted his way. No amount of fire or freshness can challenge what a man can store up in his ghostly heart (p.103).

In the common sense of a patriarchal system, an "honest" women should feel highly in debt to a man who chooses her to follow his beliefs, but this kind of women does not exist in Nick's narrative. The lesson he teaches is to disdain all women. They are described as a reflection of male psychology and male fantasized life which does not fit in reality. That is how the narrative links the male romantic imagination to a moral indignation upon women.

On the other hand, the relation between Tom and Daisy is also narrated by Nick. He presents how nostalgic this life of the East was, in contrast, to the life in the West, where there was always a dream to fight for, a future expectation, agitation, movement. Then, he presents Tom and his idea about "civilization's going to pieces" (p.19) right after Tom was called a "brute of a man, a great, big , hulking physical specimen" (p.18) by his wife. Nick's ironical narrative increases the reader's antipathy for Tom. The idea is that he defends civilization but he acts like a brute. " 'Civilization is going to pieces,' broke out Tom violently" (p.19). Civilization stands as a cultural idea in which he has the right, due to his

breeding, to maintain his position of dominance in relation to women and the lower classes. And Daisy ironically agrees with Tom: “ ‘We’ve got to beat them down’, whispered Daisy, winking ferociously toward the fervent sun” (p.19). Nick describes Daisy’s “magical image of seduction” breaking into pieces. It is described as “fading like the sunshine light over her face”:

For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled me forward breathlessly as I listened- then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk (Ibidem, p.20).

From that moment on, he was immunized from Daisy’s power of seduction. And this is what distinguishes him from Gatsby because, according to him, Gatsby could not realize how dangerous Daisy’s seduction could be. Nick makes an effort to show the slightest proximity to Daisy’s mind: “ [...] a stirring warmth flowed from her, as if her heart was trying to come out [...] ” (p.21). And he mentions that, after Daisy’s argument with Tom, she tries again to return to her original position of seductive woman, describing the “romantic outdoors” and inviting Nick to go to the stables with her after dinner. Nick’s narrative is trying to show how “easy” she is, how her jealousy makes her act like a “whore”, through he does not use this word. She is described as if she were always wearing a kind of mask, trying to convince him to stay by her side.

As a social outsider, the narrator believes that the only thing Daisy should have done, after having discovered that her husband has a mistress, was to take her child and to run away. By still living there with Tom, she proved her connivance with the situation. The narrative does not mention that, by ‘running away’ she would lose her high financial and moral position, which is what her connection with Tom represents. In addition, her past was “cleaned” when she married Tom and she established with him a pact of connivance. Besides this, she could go on taking advantages being in the position of her husband’s victim, which is a terrible idea according to Nick’s moralistic opinion. It is terrible for him because she is a woman and as such, she should submit herself to a social moral order in which lovers are not allowed in marriage contracts. She is entrapped by her social position, but above this, she is entrapped for being female. And females are “The Others”, the ones that men need to fear and avoid in the narrative’s construction of a fearful femininity. Women are considered powerful while they are seductive. This is the only power women are allowed to have and Daisy knows it. But, by turning public her situation with Tom, she would suffer the

consequences more deeply than Tom. She would lose her position of advantage, while Tom would remain there. And Nick would be morally satisfied with this.

Nick considers Daisy's complaint about Tom's insensitiveness in relation to her and their child part of a female strategy. She exposes her condition by revealing her first speech after her child's birth: "I'm glad it's a girl. And I hope she'll be a fool- that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a *beautiful little fool*" (p.24, italics mine). She inscribes her child in a discourse of femininity. In this stand, she angrily exposes what she considers the position of women in that society. Only by being a fool, one will accept the social demand upon women, without questioning or suffering. A beautiful foolish girl is a model of perfectionism which fits in patriarchal society because it turns real women into objects of a male's gaze and desire. Then, she returns to the present moment, saying:

" You see I think everything's terrible anyhow," she went on in a convinced way. "Everybody thinks so- the most advanced people. And I know. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything" (p.24).

She speaks in a defiant way and Nick is ironic saying that she speaks in a "convinced" way as if she were only feigning again. He never takes her speech seriously:

The instant her voice broke off, ceasing to compel my attention, my belief, I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy as if the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me [...] if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged (p.24).

Besides this, Daisy's child appears just once during the narrative. Through he had heard about the girl, Gatsby ignored her till the moment he saw her: "Afterwards he kept looking at the child with surprise. I don't think he had ever really believed in its existence before" (p. 123). In addition, we have a clear evidence of Tom's negligence in relation to the child. The child is only allowed to appear in the living room when Tom is out. And the only thing the girl asks is "Where is Daddy?" After that, the nurse takes her out.: " Daisy sat back upon the couch. The nurse took a step forward and held out her hand. 'Come, Panny.' 'Good-bye, sweetheart!'" – says Daisy (p. 123). This represents a cold treatment towards the child. There is also an essentialist position about men. They do not have anything to do with child caring. This is considered a female function in the novel.

In the sequence, Nick manages to associate Daisy with Tom's hypocrisy: "Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with thrilling scorn.

‘Sophisticated-God, I’m sophisticated!’” (p.24), as if she were proud of her capacity to feign. Her speech reduces her to a position of elegant authority, pre-established for her by society when she married Tom. She had played the social game, thus society allows her to be sophisticated, it is her reward.

The message is clear: Daisy is not trustful. Nick regards her suffering as a pose, so he discredits her ability to argue about her own female experience. From that moment on he justifies why he does not listen to anything Daisy, or Jordan or any other woman says. It is important to remember a quotation Nick used when thinking about Daisy: “I had no sight into Daisy’s heart” (p.12). We could add that, based on his statements, he has no intention at all to understand the women he describes. He summarizes the female condition as one of dissimulation. To this extent, Judith Fetterley argues that: “Daisy may cry over Gatsby’s shirts but Nick has seen that no tears will be shed over her” (FETTERLEY, 1978, p.85).

Let us consider Daisy’s punishment: Nick shows her fall. In the first scene she is located in a high position: she is fluctuating on a high porch. In the last scene, the space she occupies is the kitchen, facing a cold chicken. This is proof of how the narrative has articulated to put her in “her place”, destituted from all glamour, being just a common flower, as her name suggests. She is destituted from her magical aura. As a Modern woman she is simply one more, subjected to a husband in order to maintain her place by his side, which is the only place society really allows her to occupy.

Valdemar Ribeiro Filho says:

She is the legendary princess of the tower, the golden girl that every man is eager to possess[...] Her whiteness is pure, but it is associated with the yellow of gold to suggest the corruption that money inevitably brings. Like money she promises more than she can certainly give (1991, p.41).

“Her voice is full of money” is the conclusion Nick provides. It connects her to materialistic possessions and ambition. When Nick first describes the wealthy couple Tom and Daisy, he presents their emptiness, aimless and careless behavior, besides their constant movement in space. Daisy believes they will settle in East: “This is a permanent move [...]”. Thus, we see the woman’s task: to find a place to rest, to settle, to fix an identity position, as can be observed:

They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrest fully wherever people played polo and were rich together. This is a permanent move, said Daisy [...] - I had no sight into Daisy’s heart, but I felt that

Tom would drift on forever seeking...for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game (FITZGERALD, p.12).

While Tom could “drift on forever seeking”, she is supposed to maintain a fixed identity. Tom is allowed to move, give and take because he is the male, the one in charge of their future. Patriarchy and capitalism are understood as maintaining each other. In this sense, the book’s epigraph cannot be forgotten. It proves the first link, in the novel, between romantic love and power:

Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her;
If you can bounce high, bounce for her too,
Till she cry “Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover,
I must have you! (p.6).

There is a kind of ritual here, a code of behavior that demands a predictable answer. The epigraph is a love recipe, that is supposed to work based on the belief that women are seduced, are bought by the power of money, in opposition to men, who are the ones entrapped by women. Gatsby chose Daisy because she was supposed to follow that *recipe*- a social demand upon genders. He strongly believes money can buy her heart. As long as he could get money, she was achievable. He chooses, and fights, while she accepts to belong to the winner in a dispute for materialistic possessions. But what the narrative covers is that she is not allowed to leave her husband for Gatsby. In the beginning she says she is “paralyzed by happiness”. She already belongs to the East, she is paralyzed there. In this representation of society, there is no better place except the one in which she already is. As a love- affair, Gatsby is admitted into her life, but she will not be allowed to replace her husband for Gatsby. In any term, she is condemned: by leaving her husband she would be judged by society as immoral and by leaving Gatsby, Nick and most of the readers repudiate her for being ungrateful.

While Gatsby plays the part of the gold-hatted lover, Nick articulates why and plays out the power game to its predestined conclusion. According to Judith Fetterley , “The drama here is a drama of power, and the lesson is how to move one’s self into a position of advantage” (FETTERLEY, 1978, p. 83). It is a lesson Nick learns well and it provides the pattern for much of his behavior. What is implicit is the belief that women must occupy a submitted position, otherwise they will not be welcomed. In this sense, women do not have any power, they depend on men’s money.

Myrtle, as well as Daisy and Jordan, is prevented from acting. When she tries, she is punished and she is erased from the narrative. Daisy is considered irresponsible for her acts. And Jordan is a cosmopolitan woman discharged by Nick. The punishment for her liberty in competing with men is to remain alone, without Nick, the perfect guide, at least, in his own eyes. Doreen Massey argues that “social relations have a spatial form and a spatial content” (1994, p.168.) As Jordan is linked to the city, to the high-class East society and to dishonesty, she is denigrated to Nick’s eyes. He fixed her in the East, right from the beginning, and he compares her to a “good illustration” (p. 184). Since she did not answer Nick’s last comment about himself, it seems that she agrees with Nick’s last speech. She says:

‘You said a bad driver was only safe until she met another bad driver? Well, I met another bad driver, didn’t I? I mean it was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you [Nick] were rather an honest, straightforward person. I thought it was your secret pride.’

‘I’m thirty,’ I said. ‘I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor.’

She didn’t answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away (p. 184- 185).

Nick wants to distinguish himself from her “dishonesty” and the last word is his own. But, contradicting his words, it seems that he left her exactly in order to maintain his honor and his pose of an honest man. Her silence is understood as an agreement. Jordan did not answer because nothing she could say would make any difference. The female characters’ voice in the novel is never seriously considered according to Nick’s judgments. The question is not the existence of another point of view, but whether or not we realize it.

Besides this, women’s mobility is restricted by men’ violence. While the high-class women have the slightest chance to decide what to do, the lower class woman is the receiving end of violence. Myrtle could not even express her choice as Daisy could. While the reader pities George - and this is the focus of Nick’s narration - the wider circumstances of Myrtle’s attitude are never explained, because, as in the case of Daisy, the narrator also has no view into Myrtle’s heart. He judges all of them for their behavior, but the main difference for him in relation to the two women is that he feels disgusted about Myrtle having an affair outside her marriage, while he accepts and even helps Daisy to have one with Gatsby. The narrator considers Daisy’s pleasant behavior as inconstant, as feigned, but he does not want to disappoint Gatsby for he knows *she* will disappoint him.

Nick scorns Tom’s violence against Myrtle, but by presenting her as an unfaithful woman who humiliates her husband, she seems to be responsible for this violence. This

proves that in a modern male point of view, those conceived as “immoral women” are the ones who disregard social rules. If they are lower class women, they will probably suffer male violence, as an example for the respectable ones to “stay at home”.

Judith Fetterley argues that women should remain locked in their ‘white palaces’ for two reasons: To be available for the heroic gestures of men and to be the scapegoats of men’s disillusion. Gatsby depends on Daisy to determine his identity, in the same way, Nick depends on Jordan. Woman is “the Other”, the deviation of the norm, the cause of troubles. In this sense, for a woman, love means submission to a man. Daisy cannot say she never loved Tom. When she marries him, she agrees with being his possession and, according to the narrative, this fact can not be deleted. According to Nick, Daisy is chained to a place that is as corrupted as she is. It is conceived, not as a social demand, but as her ‘sin’, her ‘uncleanness’. Her fixed place is the East¹⁹. There is a non-existing sense of self for her outside the East. More than being linked to a man, she is linked to a social contract and she has a child that men simply ignore. Implicitly, this child’s future depends on her “choices”.

The negative consequences of capitalism in society are described in relation to female negative representations. Nick runs back to his moral world to maintain his stable and coherent male identity away from the female’s dangerous influence. He defends an ideology of individualism, of non- tolerance of the Other, demystifying the East in order to feel proud about being mid-Western, about being American. The novel’s representations of gender relations work as a social control over identity when it demands the reader’s identification with the narrator and with Gatsby, who seem so sympathetic, while the women described are considered pathetic and cynical liars. The novel is a male self-presentation. Women and low class voices are never allowed to speak for themselves, there is always the narrator’s interference, judging them, tentatively enclosing their identities. For Gatsby, Daisy does not even exist apart from him. This is definitely not the place where we want to locate ourselves as female readers.

¹⁹ The East stands for the aristocratic world of high-class society in America, corrupted by materialism.

3. Representation of Race, Ethnicity and Social Class

As literature inscribes social behaviors rather than only reporting them, the socio-ideological division of society in gender, class, race, ethnicity and many other groups should be further analyzed. The way these representations construct and maintain prejudices in relation to identity and identification will receive attention as a mode of emphasizing literary effects upon readers.

The Great Gatsby is a book marked by contradictions and written for a specific audience by an artist whose voice represents a larger culture of which it is a part. His writings do not fully replicate the structure of public values, but their effects affect distinct audiences differently. For instance, though it is about *whites*, the novel reflects a racial sensibility. All the main characters are white, but there is a racial tension in the narrative as a result of analogies between race, class and power. These categories are arranged in the novel carrying an idea of ideal identity, which ironically discharges other identities, and reveals a culture in an uncomfortable position, facing the existence of other cultures and other identities which are non-white, non-male, non- American middle class.

3.1. Race and Ethnicity

According to Kenan Malik in his article: “The Changing Meaning of Race” (2001), historically, the discourses of race emerged out of the complex interaction between the Enlightenment ideology of equality and developing capitalist social relations. Progress appeared to exacerbate social divisions. Certain types of people were considered incapable of progressing. They were classified as inferior, sharing fundamental biological heritage, moral and intellectual characteristics. Intelligence and honesty were considered inherited traces along with a person’s racial essence. In Victorian times, race was as much a description of ethnic differences as it was of class differences. It developed as a way of explaining the persistence of social divisions in a Occidental society that had a deep belief in equality. There was the belief that the destiny of different social groups was shaped, at least in part, by their intrinsic properties.

The Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century gave birth to the thought that the whole of humanity might not possess a common, innate nature. What transformed the romantic notion of difference into racism was its alliance with the Positivist philosophy and with science. Positivism was a philosophical tradition, developed largely from the work of the French thinker August Comte, which used science to legitimize social order. For positivists, the laws of nature also underpinned social laws. Inequality was the inevitable consequence of the laws of nature. In this way, racial distinctions accounted for social inequalities. And racial thinkers divided humanity into discrete groups, each with particular properties. The divisions would remain immutable and unchanging. This means that, as social divisions persisted, they began to be presented as natural, not social. Racial ideology was the inevitable product of the persistence of differences in rank and class.

In modern times, the belief that lower orders were inferior did not disappear but it became less public and increasingly confined to private talk. The shift was from a racial to a cultural view of human differences. Biology and anthropology officially started to argue that 'race' was a meaningless concept. The classifications as *Negro*, or *Causation* did not present biological relevance because

There are too many people who do not fit into any such category and, even when you succeed in assigning someone to one of these categories- on the basis of skin-pigmentation and hair- that implies very little about most of their other biological characteristics (APPIAH, 1990, p. 277).

Race is still a category with a profound impact on people's lives. It helped bind together order and progress. It allowed thinkers to imagine that progress was inevitable, but only in the hand of a certain race. Thus, white, middle-class males believed themselves the destined by nature to progress. What lies at the heart of contemporary discussions about race is the questioning of the existence of a single world which unifies humanity. If there is only one truth – a common law- different people respond to it in different ways according to different cultures and it establishes racial division. On the other hand, there is the vision of cultural pluralism, which “denies a common objective understanding of the world: every world is specific to the people who inhabit it and incommensurate to the social world that other people inhabit” (MALIK, 2001, p.8).

For Pluralism, what we call “the world” depends upon our perception and culture. This belief does not deny the existence of other possible coherent perceptions - other “worlds”. In the beginning of the 20th century, specifically in the World War I period, this

relativist theory of culture rose. Inquiries were made about the validity of progress. The concept of a plural society was useful to explain social division. Inequalities of colonial society were considered products of differences among cultures. To this extent, the anthropologist J. S. Fumival wrote: “A plural society is one in which different sections of the society live side by side, but separately within the same political unit” (FUMIVAL apud MALIK, 2001, p. 9). “Inequality” was called “difference”- the inevitable result of social organization. According to this conception:

Humanity was composed of a multitude of peoples each inhabiting their own symbolic and cultural worlds, [...] racial theory and cultural pluralism were characterized by a common hostility to Universalism, and a belief that differences between human groups mattered more than the commonalities (MALIK, 2001, p.10).

The experience of Nazism, the Holocaust, the impact of mass immigration, in the years following the World War I period discredited discourses upon race. They were replaced by discussions upon “ethnicity”, as a way of neutralizing the hostile political environment involving the issue. Werner Sollors (1990) states that “the Greek word ‘ethnos’ significantly contains an ambivalence between the inclusive meaning ‘people in general’ and the dissociative sense “other people” (SOLLORS, 1990, p.288). Together with nationalism- which stresses birth in a specific territory, “ethnicity and ethnocentrism may thus be described as modern Europe’s and North American’s most successful export items” (p. 286) argues Sollors. This social division revitalizes the German philosopher Herder’s idea that each nation presents specific attributions - the “unchanging spirit of the people expressed through myths, songs and culture” (MALIK, 2001, p.5). One of the problems of this conception is that the individual’s sense of belonging to a nation or an ethnic group is conceived as ahistorical and essentialist.

Malik explains that “Race” still remains in American usage, as in case of “Irish race” or “Jewish race”, but, mostly, its semantic meaning refers to ethnicity. The difference is that race is related to physical characteristics, mainly skin color, while the second deals with subjective, cultural characteristics. Ethnical traces are much more relative.

The author considers that, in the beginning of the 20th century, in the USA, the discrimination of immigrants and their exclusion from mainstream society was conceived as an expression of cultural diversity. There was a great difference between the first settlers of the United States and the later immigrants. While the first were instigated to create a sense of national identity, the latter were received with more hostility. They received English classes

and instruction in order to incorporate American values of freedom, self-reliance, and competition. But accepting these American values was not a guarantee of equality. Racial and ethnic discrimination was very strong and when the nation's economic growth was about to enter in a period of decline, the integration of immigrants became even more problematic.

In *The Great Gatsby*, only the villain explicitly states racial and ethnic prejudice. Tom is represented as a traditional male figure, a New Haven football player. “[...] a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anti-climax. His family were enormous wealthy [...]” (FITZGERALD, 1975 p. 12). He had traveled along Europe till he finally bought a place in Long Island. In his house, we see the influence of European style. The house has French windows, whose curtains are compared to flags and “Italian gardens” (p. 13-14). And he is very satisfied with his position. “ ‘Oh, I’ll stay in the East, don’t you worry,’ [...] I’d be a God dammed fool to live anywhere else” (p.16).

Tom is a racist, and his prejudice is extended to lower classes. His “civilization” is related to high social-class privileges which he hopes to maintain intact from the interference of the “new-riches”, who are owners of money without a family tradition to sustain. Tom is the only character who speaks explicitly about race and he is the bad guy of the story. It is certainly not a coincidence.

“Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they’ll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.”

Flushed with his impassioned gibberish [Tom] saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization.

“We are all white here”, murmured Jordan (FITZGERALD, p. 136).

Black and *white* stand as opposites. Implicitly *blacks* are invading a space to which they do not belong. The “last barrier of civilization” is a racial barrier. In this sense, a connection between *black* and *white*, that is not one of subordination, would destroy Tom’s idea of civilization.

When race is considered a category of analysis, it is not difficult to realize the binary opposition between order and disorder which is connected explicitly to racial differences. The idea is that “blacks” are contaminating the puritan “whites”, whose function it is to sustain civilization. For Tom, the word “black” extends to all other ethnic groups which do

not descend from American high-class Puritans. *Blacks* are, in this sense, the *Others*²⁰. It goes beyond a matter of skin color. It stands for the symbolic meaning of the black color. Tom's national identity is defined due to distinctions of race, ethnicity and social class, which are actually mutually constitutive in his discourse. Let's consider the excerpt from the novel:

“You make me feel uncivilized, Daisy [...]”, says Nick.

“Civilization is going to pieces” broke out Tom violently. “I've gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Colored Empires* by this man Goddard?”[...] Well, it's a fine book and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be- utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved [...] It is up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things”.

“We've got to beat them down,” whispered Daisy[...]

“You ought to live in California”- began Miss Baker, but Tom interrupted:

“The idea is that we're Nordics [...] and we've produced all things that go to make civilization- oh, science and art, and all that. Do you see?” (p.19-20)

From the quotations above, we can establish connections between the way the novel represents²¹ reality. The presented meaning of race²² is intrinsically linked to a representation of place, social class and gender. And these categories build together an idea of identity, of belongingness. In the mentioned excerpt, we have the narrator's voice: “there is something pathetic in [Tom]'s concentration, as if his complacency, more acute than of old, was not enough to him any more[...]" (p.20). There is the suggestion that Tom was ready to act in order to “save” civilization. This idea has its roots in Imperialism.²³

Tom points out that a matter of identity separates Gatsby from Daisy. Though he made money, Gatsby could not change his breed. To Tom, Gatsby was symbolically “non-white”, “non-pure”, and non-aristocratic. The conception of purity is also questioned by Tom, when he speaks about Daisy. “This idea is that we're Nordics[says Tom]. I am, and you [Nick] are, and you [Jordan] are and – After an infinitesimal hesitation he includes Daisy with a slight nod, and she winked at me again [...]" (p. 20). Tom hesitated in considering

²⁰ These *Others* represent what is foreign and also foreigners. The point here is the construction of nationality, marked by ethnic origin of social class. The foreign “destabilize local hierarchies of taste and power.” (MORLEY, 1996, p. 331) That is why Tom believes they should remain subordinated or, better yet, should be eliminated.

²¹ Representation is considered a “symbolic code, a system of signs which materialize reality” (SCHMIDT, 1999, p.37).

²² Race is considered a political and social construction. It belongs to a discourse which organizes a system of cultural exclusion- racism. It disguises the cultural exclusion and tries to justify the socio-economical differences as a genetic or biological effect, represented by the skin color, hair or face traces (HALL, 2003).

²³ The conventional model of cultural imperialism presumes the existence of a pure, internally homogeneous, authentic culture, which becomes subverted or corrupted by foreign influence. (MORLEY, 1996, p. 330).

Daisy as a Nordic woman. She is Nick's cousin and a daughter of a rich traditional family from Louisville. But, as her name suggest, she is symbolically a flower- a Daisy- which has white petals and a yellow center. The symbolical suggestion here is that behind Daisy's whiteness, there is a yellow corrupted essence. Daisy is likely to be influenced or contaminated by the *Other*. In Tom's opinion, she is not as *white* and pure as she pretends to be. The narrative sequence suggests that she had a "dark" past because, before marrying Tom, she had been engaged to another man and she had had lots of lovers and admirers, such as a man called Biloxi (p. 134). Implicitly, she was not "pure" when she married him, so he hesitates in saying that she belongs to that "clean white race", the one he feels the need to preserve.

Handley mentions that "Race, according to Fitzgerald... is an 'idea', a 'northerliness' not dependent on either nation or biology ..." (HANDLEY, 2002, p. 165). He points that "Gatsby's failure, in the eyes of Nick and Tom, is caused by the accident of his birth as 'James Gatz of North Dakota,' the son of a poor immigrant, who is more Germanic than each of them [...]" (Ibidem, p. 165). The narrative suggests that, even getting money Gatsby could not change his past. And, consequently, he could not find a place in East society.

There are other moments, in the narrative, in which comments about race take place. When Daisy speaks about the butler's nose – a racial trace- the guests' comments are ironic and they carry implicitly a racial prejudice. " 'Do you want to hear about the butler's nose?' [Asked Daisy] 'That's why I came over to-night.'" (FITZGERALD, p.20) [Nick replies ironically].

Nick exposes Tom and Daisy's racial prejudice, but he does not make it explicit what he thinks about the subject- "race". Nick is anxious not to be seen as racist. Patricia Williams writes of the repression involved in the non-seeing.

In a sense, race matters are resented and repressed in much the same way as matters of sex and scandal: the subject is considered a rude and transgressive, a matter whose observation is sometimes inevitable, but about which, once seen, little should be heard... Race thus tends to be treated as though it were a especially delicate category of social infirmity-so called-like extreme obesity or disfigurement (WILLIAM, 1997, p. 6).

But, Mr. Wolfshiem, one of Gatsby's gangster friends, is described by Nick as a 'flat-nosed Jew' (p. 75), with a funny accent: "He is an Oggsford man" (p.78). Nick's racial and ethnical prejudices emerge from the physical description of his "characters". There are

other moments, in Nick's description of the setting, in which his own prejudice arises, always mixed with sarcasm:

As we crossed Blackwell's Island a limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl. *I laughed aloud* as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry.

Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge, anything at all [...]. Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.75).

Nick expresses his surprise laughing aloud when he sees a white driver working for Negroes, because, obviously, the image of a white chauffeur conducting Negroes is considered a fantasy, it is the vision of something impossible or very odd in the novel's contextual reality. The opposite would be expected: a Negro chauffeur conducting white people. It is evident how race should determine each one's place in the scene. Nick uses the word "buck" in his description, which is a male deer. It suggests a link between people of African descent to animals. It seems that the new black status in the American society of the 20s leads to a feeling of competition. And Nick's laughter expresses this possibility as something ridiculous and also fearful.

There is a parallelism between the Negroes and Gatsby. Crossing the bridge is like entering a world of fantasy in which Negroes can occupy a position of advantage and even Gatsby, with all his exotic characteristics, could achieve the position he requires beside Daisy. The cultural *Other* frames a particular view of whiteness as dull and boring in contrast to exotic otherness. This "other" ends up being destroyed, while Nick, Jordan, Tom and Daisy remain alive. Suggestively, there is no place for Gatsby in reality, he is an outsider. Has Tom done something to save his family- his "civilization" – from the interference of this "outsider"?

Before answering this question, we need to look further in order to identify other forms of social division in the narrative. William Handley in his article "Accident and Destiny: Fitzgerald's Fantastic Geography"²⁴ points out that: "Fitzgerald dissects the ways that ethnic²⁵ and class divisions perpetuate both the romance and violence of American

²⁴ see: HANDLEY, William R. *Marriage, Violence and the Nation in the American Literary West*. West New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁵ By ethnicity I mean all the "points of attachment which give the individual some sense of place and position in the world, whether these be in relation to particular communities, localities, territories, language, religions or cultures" (HALL, 1996, p. 237). The positions mentioned are not fixed. Actually, ethnicity is a postwar word. The *Oxford English Dictionary* recorded it in 1953. Julian Huxley in a book called *We Europeans*, was the first

civilization” (2002, p. 159). In the set of binary oppositions in the novel, race cannot be separated from class. Egalitarian democracy is questioned. In this sense, according to Handley, “violence among whites marks the culmination of class antagonisms in the fight for intra-racial supremacy” (p.160). In the American Dream’s ideology, race is only an implicit category, while class is the one elected to be discussed openly. And a person’s aim should be to belong to the upper class.

3.2. Social Class

Social class describes the relationships between people in hierarchical societies or cultures. According to William Handley, “ while anthropologists, historians and sociologist identify class as a social structure emerging from pre-history, the idea of social class entered the English lexicon about the 1770” (2002, p.32). This is still connected to the idea of socio-economic class. Societies are stratified into a hierarchical system based on occupation, economic status, wealth, or income, properties, manners, style and cultural refinement.

Karl Marx defines class in terms of the extent to which an individual or social group has control over the means of production. Class categories are then defined by continuing historical processes. Their origin lies in the division of the social product into a necessity to make a living and a superfluous one. The basic historical distinction is between those who control production and those who produce goods or services in society. In this sense, classes are not static entities, but are regenerated daily through the productive process. While Marx believes that the economic structure is the base of a society, Fredric Jameson (1986) mentions the importance of culture and of literature as a cultural artefact. He states that base and superstructure present an allegorical equivalence. Literary texts are ideological investments, in which allegories are used to express other levels of signification. In literature, characters stand for other elements in distinct levels of interpretation. In this sense, the characters may represent a whole group or social class, incorporating the interests of that class. Jameson argues that these levels are interconnected and interdependent. But, contradictions are usually

to suggest that ‘race’ should be replaced by ‘ethnic group’. He argued that the replacement would remove the political connotations of racial difference, and allow social distinctions to be studied in a neutral, value-free fashion. There is no consensus about the meaning of ‘ethnicity’. It is based on subjective, cultural differences. It means that boundaries between ethnic groups are fluid (MALIK, 2001, p.11).

controlled, manipulated or repressed in order to save the text's coherence. The desire of a social category is then embodied in the desire of the hero or of the narrator in a process which covers the conflicts between an ideal homogenization and a particular apprehension of social reality. Literature is then a mediator process usually used to spread and perpetuate the view of the hegemonic class in a process of cultural universalization, in which values are positioned in a relation of opposition between different social classes.

According to Myra Jehlen, America was a new home that the middle class built for itself. It is based on the idea that the "Founding Fathers" built a structure which suited the needs of people, no matter their original nationality. "America inherited this perfectionist ideal, the paradise that would be built by progress, transcending class and history" (JEHLEN, 1986, p. 136). But, according to Handley: "Fitzgerald's Americans are highly conscious of ethnic and class differences" (2002, p. 161).

The effects of the American Dream upon a not so egalitarian society are matters of reflection in *The Great Gatsby*. There is a wide range of contrasts between a supposed middle class, whose origin is provincial, an urban high class, and the marginalized poor ones. There is clearly an attempt to fix the meaning of particular places, to enclose them. East Egg, West Egg, and the Valley of Ashes are the three major settings in the novel. Each place encloses a social class and its distinct code of behavior. New York city and Middle- West stand in a relation of opposition between a mystic, violent, corrupted, unstable urban atmosphere and the idealized pastoral rural "garden". It seems that settings determine the actions, more than the characters.

Thinking specifically about *place*, in the novel, there are two main male characters longing for a place. Both the protagonist and the narrator (Gatsby and Nick) leave the Middle-West in order to find success and a space in the East society.

East Egg is like a fairyland. It is characterized by words such as "palace", "tower", "princess", and "gold". The predominant color is white, which suggests a white Anglo-Saxon dominance. It is a place for the aristocratic class with a Puritan heritage, those who have lived in a comfortable, careless, privileged position and who believe in their "divine" right to maintain themselves there, establishing boundaries and avoiding the interference of other classes or ethnicities. It is Daisy, Tom and Jordan's place.

While East Egg is described as a place full of bright colors, West Egg is a sinister one in which the new rich live with their non-Anglo names and endless ambition. Ribeiro

(1993) mentions that, Gatsby's house is a tasteless and vulgar place which does not match with the possessions of those who live in the East, a place of refined people. The classes are defined in relation to each other. We can figure who the characters are by observing their positions of dominance and subordination in relation to each other. The unequal relations of wealth and power maintain some regions and some categorized people under control. The Valley of Ashes is the place for the poor, those who do not have any other options in the novel except to accept their subordinated positions.

In the narrative, Myrtle belongs to the valley, but she hopes to find a place for herself outside it. As a lower class woman, she receives a slap- which breaks her nose- from Tom, in order to show where her place is. Since she still does not conform, she is eliminated. In the novel's universe of enunciation, it is a female lower class female's "natural" punishment for her tentative interference in the East's closed code of behavior. By telling Daisy, the fine lady, that she, Myrtle, was having an affair with her husband Tom, Myrtle had passed the borders of her social space and this had to be prevented from happening.

In literature, we usually find a description of a social outsider. In this novel, there are two kinds of outsiders: the Valley of Ashes' inhabitants and the middle-Westerners. The first are described as the result of industrialization. They are outsiders who have no rights, no liberty to choose or to move. There is no hope for a better future. They are the ones who make the social machine move. They work for the "East" society to maintain its privileges. *Ash* people do not even have the chance to dream. And when they dare to, according to the middle-Westerners, their only possible dream is social mobility. Since they work for a greater structure, they just occupy a function. On the first movement of rebellion, they are cut off from the novel. Thus, Myrtle and her husband are easily cut off.

The other outsiders are the Middle-Westerners, middle-class. Their voices speak in the novel, they argue for their rights, they want to know what happened to their dreams. Their physic-geographical mobility is intrinsically connected to social mobility and to money. In order to save money, they engage in illicit activities, which are justified due to the prophetic need to achieve economical success. Gatsby and Nick are this kind of outsider.. They are both descendents of a rural provincial environment and they try to engage themselves in the urban high society, which is the idealized place, then it is devalued throughout the story. The concept of being an outsider develops the spirit of longing to join the fashionable "American class", while it presents the incongruity between a bourgeoisie middle-class in ascension and an aristocratic system of values, these last being considered emptied, careless, degraded ones.

The middle class bourgeois male voices are the ones who receive credibility in the book. “They speak of a way of life so completely internalized that it could define America, by excluding all American voices who are not middle class, nor male” (BERCOVITCH, 1986, p.420).

Ethnic and class division take a geographical shape in the novel. Lower classes are the ones who will suffer violence provoked by the high class’s irresponsibility. When characters move from their original settings, it is a way of transgression of social borders. It provokes violent consequences, specially for the lower classes, because, in this socio-geographic representation, their mobility is restricted by class determinations. When Myrtle arrives at the apartment Tom rented for her in New York, we can observe how Nick describes her distress. He tries to show how she is out of place, and how this dislocation affects her vitality:

Mrs. Wilson had changed her costume[...] the intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive *hauteur*. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment, and as she expanded the room grew smaller around her, until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.36).

As Nick goes on describing the meeting, he presents the others that are present: Myrtle’s sister Catherine- a “worldly- minded girl”- and her friends Mr. And Mrs. McKee. They are described as vulgar and sordid people. After some bottles of whisky, Myrtle and Tom have a discussion. Even Nick gets drunk. Tom breaks his mistress’s nose with his open hand because Myrtle had shouted, desecrating Daisy’s name. Tom’s attitude presents his position of authority and Myrtle’s inferiority in relation to Daisy- the ultimate furnishing in his establishment in the East. Myrtle had no right to mention Daisy’s saintly name. She is violently punished, in contrast to Daisy, who called her husband “hulking”, and was just, “politely objected” by him.

Violence is accepted as natural, specially between a man and a woman who has no moral right to stay by his side. Myrtle is aware of her condition, so she seems to worry more about her tapestry, which is covered by her blood than about herself: “ [...] the despairing figure on the couch [Myrtle], bleeding fluently, and trying to spread a copy of *Town Tattle* over the tapestry scenes of Versailles” (Ibidem, p. 43). It is important to remember that she comes from the “world of ashes”, in which material possibilities are described as being more important than human beings. At least, this is the way Nick understands her attitude.

Her life as a rich man's mistress is short and it does not provide her social mobility. Tom's violence against Myrtle, besides being a gendered violence, is also an indication of the East's symbolic violence against the outsiders.

Tom and George occupy extreme opposite social positions in the novel. As both know, society is organized around the idea of getting money. George blames himself because he was not able to get the money his wife deserved. On the other hand, Tom was born with a "name" and with money. He seems to have rented George's wife for sex. "Tom has got some woman in New York" (Ibidem, p.21). This attitude receives Nick's moral disapproval, but it adds points to Tom popularity. It was expected for a man of his social position to have a love affair outside his marriage²⁶. It only becomes a problem because this woman starts to interfere in his private domestic life with Daisy, so it is time to get rid of her. According to Nick's ironic remark, Tom's women escaped his control. "His wife and his mistress, until an hour ago secure and inviolate, were slipping precipitately from his control [...]" (FITZGERALD, 1975, p. 131).

Tom and George stand in a binary opposition, as well. The first represents the centre, which radiates a marginal and dependent periphery zone: George's location. When Nick thinks about Tom and George and their relation to women, right after Myrtle's death, he concludes that:

There was no difference between men, in intelligence or race, so profound as the difference between the sick and the well. Wilson was so sick that he looked guilty, unforgivably guilty- as if he had just got some poor girl with child (Ibidem, p.130).

In Nick's opinion, Tom and George are distinguished by their social class. As a member of the upper class, Tom does not fear anybody. He is completely secure about himself and his position. He knows that there is nothing above him and he is the one "elected" to take control over things. The narrative suggests that even the accidents are premeditated: "There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they [Tom and Daisy] were conspiring together" (p. 152). In the novel, the idea of a superior force- a divine providence- with a high moral judgement only exists for the poor. The high class does not feel guilty because their status represent the power to determine and

²⁶ Tom's situation with this woman is different from Daisy who goes to the point of saying that she is in love with a person of a lower social class, which is, in Tom's high class code of behavior, much more likely to be condemned, specially because she is a woman.

manipulate the future without constraint. It is also what the song provided by Klipspringer, Gatsby's pianist player, suggests:

One thing's sure and nothing's surer
The rich get richer and the poor get –children.
In the meantime,
In between time (Ibidem, p. 102).

But in this narrative, things are not so simple. The Valley of Ashes is a sterile land. George and Myrtle do not have children, and he blames himself. He believed himself to be a failure in taking care of, and in controlling, his wife, which was supposed to be a duty in a marriage contract. First, he feels unable to fight for what he considers justice because he ignores who killed his wife. So, first, he expects for divine providence - the eyes of "God" should see what was happening and they would bring him justice. He knows there is a social demand for revenge. He has no descendants, nor a future, nothing to lose, nor to look for. Therefore, he is lead to act violently. He understands it as his social duty. Myrtle's last words to him, before the accident were: 'Beat me!' he [George] heard her cry. 'Throw me down and beat me, you dirty little coward!'" (p. 143). After his wife's death, he decided not be a coward anymore, which means, he decides to kill the one responsible for his wife's death. He enters the social game to lose, because vengeance seems to be his only expectation. Ironically, he ends up saving his wife's murderer – Daisy- and his wife's lover- Tom. His act is misdirected, but it cleans up the mess. It suggests how poor people are easily manipulated by the rich, for them to get what they want. George is entrapped by the meaning of the advertisement, which stands for the sanctification of the industrial society. While it represents the idea that God observes and judges people's acts, it is clearly a parodied symbol of capitalism, in which some work in order to maintain the privileges of others. Religiosity is used to maintain control over the means of production .In George's words: "I told her [Myrtle] she might fool me but she couldn't fool God. I took her to the window [...] and I said God knows what you've been doing, everything you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God" (p.166). Right after, his friend Michaelis comments that "the God" George is pointing to outside the window is just an advertisement. "'God sees everything,' repeated Wilson. 'that's an advertisement,' Michaelis assured him" (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.166).

George ends up helping the ones who injured him because he was not able to make the right connections. The action is portrayed as the result of a fatalistic situation. First,

information was hidden from George. Then, Tom realizes it is an opportunity to get rid of his enemies, and he misleads George. Finally, Tom ends up free from responsibility. There is no democratic law, nor a common sense of justice. There is freedom only for those who own money.

On the other hand, the Middle- West is described as a moral paradise. “The absence of boundaries is no longer westward.” (STARK, 1986, p.48). Fitzgerald’s model of restraint is the Midwest, a place where Nick says “one may be in uniform at a sort of moral attention forever.” (FITZGERALD, p.8) In this Middle-West, there is security, comfort, predictability. It is Nick’s place. He only travels East because he believes there are opportunities for him there.

The clearest indications of what the East and New York city mean to Nick occurs when he and Gatsby drive to Manhattan for the first time.

[...] the city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty of the world... Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge, I thought, anything at all... Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder” (Ibidem, p.75).

Daisy’s voice is also associated with “ a promise that she had done gay, exciting things just a while since and that there were gay, exciting things hovering in the next hour” (p.15-16). Though he is traveling East, looking for new possibilities of life, Nick brings the Middle-West urges of security intact with him. While he looks for new experiences, he fears disappointments, and disapproval. Commitment could only bring him disappointment. As he comments during the party with Tom and his mistress: “I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (Ibidem, p.42).

On the other hand, Gatsby is free from this “fear of reality” since he has created a “Platonic conception of himself”(p.105). He follows a personal sense of morality, in which anything that fits the fulfillment of his dream is good. Anything that deters it is unacceptable. This is what makes him great and also an outsider. Nick fears Gatsby’s commitment to a dream, which could only bring disillusion. And from Fitzgerald’s perspective, Nick is correct.

While Gatsby and Nick share the wish to move East, Tom seems to be a despicable man already there. It is implicit that Gatsby lives in the West Egg because he lacks status to be accepted in the East Egg. There is also an aspect of vulgarity in his parties. People come without being invited. Sérgio Perosa mentions that Gatsby is melancholic and aloof. He does

not drink, nor identify himself with the people there. “His isolation is something suspect and at the same time attractive” (PEROSA, 1965, p.64). Thus, the narrative presents some hints of the guests referring to the host’s personality: “He doesn’t want any trouble with anybody” (FITZGERALD, p.49), “Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once” (p.50) and “He was a German spy during the war” (p.50). He is the exotic outsider.

The narrator’s feeling of being an outsider is also emphasized: “I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table- the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone” (p.48). Observing these manners, we have here an inference about social life: a single man had to find a female partner, otherwise he would be considered unhappy, alone. Jordan arrives to save him from his loneliness. We have here an inversion of the traditional narrative since it is a woman who arrives to save him. And his feelings about that are contradictory because, at the same time he thanks her for coming, he secretly hates her and this increases his curiosity to discover the secret which would demoralize the lady. Finally, the focus of his attention turns to Gatsby’s gorgeous, eccentric smile:

He smiled understandingly [...] It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it... It faced- or seemed to face- the whole eternal world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believe in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. Precisely at this point it vanished – and I was looking at an elegant young *rough-neck* [my emphasis], a year or two over thirty, whose elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd. Some time before he introduced himself I’d got a strong impression that he was picking his words with care (FITZGERALD, p.54).

At this moment, Nick is torn between rejecting Gatsby and affirming him as a kind of romantic hero. Nick doubts Gatsby’s past at Oxford, he doubts his profitable origin:

I would have accepted without question the information that Gatsby sprang from the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York... But, young men didn’t ... drift coolly out of nowhere and buy a palace on Long Island Sound (Ibidem, p.55).

It is implicit here that each person has a fixed place in the world. Fast mobility for a single man is almost impossible, except if he is involved in some illicit activities. Even by discovering Gatsby is a gambler, Nick is so emotionally involved that he decides to put Gatsby’s noble aim above his illicit activities. The choice of adjectives explain Nick’s strong impression and admiration for Gatsby: “Then it had not been merely the stars to which he

[Gatsby] had aspired on that June night. He came alive to me, delivered suddenly from the womb of his purposeless splendor” (p.85). Nick presents his nostalgic view on humanity, which essentializes each person’s behavior: “There are only the pursued, the pursuing, the busy, and the tired”(p.86). And he is in the “bond” business, pursuing connections.

Nick’s sense of identification with Gatsby presents some contradictions from the point of view of breeding and social class. Though both are middle class and from the Middle- West, Nick and Gatsby’s pasts are distinct in relation to their parents’ class. Nick comes from a “prominent, well –to-do family , which lived in Middle West city for three generations. It was a traditional family descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch [...]I [Nick] graduated in New Haven in 1915, just a quarter of a century after my father [...]”(p.8-9). Heritage is very important to Nick. On the other hand, Gatsby is the son of a poor family of farmers. This is a fact that remains hidden till the end of the story, when Gatsby’s father appears at his funeral. Gatsby created a fantasized ancestral past for himself:

I’m the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West- all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition (Ibidem, p. 71).

Nick’s description of his own past is much more specific in relation to places and dates. Gatsby’s narration presents undetermined pronouns and he emphasizes his ancestors studied at Oxford. Implicitly, both consider it necessary to belong to a “*family tradition*” in order to aspire for a place in the East. That is why Nick understands that Gatsby created his own past in order to have a chance with Daisy. On the other hand, the sense of superiority of Nick’s speech connects him to Tom’s family tradition, while Gatsby is connected to Myrtle and her husband George. When Nick mentions Gatsby could have come from “the lower East Side of New York”, it is from the Valley of Ashes that he is talking about.

Nick’s relation to Gatsby is one of amusement, facing an exotic character, whose faith is great, but whose origin is inferior. The inevitability of Gatsby’s failure in pursuing the American Dream of success suggestively lies in his longing for an unreal past. Nick is skeptic about Gatsby’s future because it is already determined by his past. Perhaps, Fitzgerald was trying to express how America was resembling the Old World, how democracy was still a timeless dream, based on fantasy. The American past cannot be cleaned, purified from its diversity and, so, the future follows this cyclic movement in which already identified failures are repeated.

Not only Nick and Tom, but mostly Gatsby believe in natural aristocratic ascendance. That is why he shows servitude in his big parties and in his extreme valorization of Daisy and that is also why he knows there is a need to change his past in order to stay by her side. However he fails, he cannot maintain his mask of being the son of a wealthy dead family. Money was not enough for him, in the same sense that Daisy's present love was also not enough. He demanded Daisy to tell everyone she never loved Tom but she could not do that. "Oh, you want too much! She cried to Gatsby. 'I love you now-isn't that enough? I can't help what's past'" (p. 139). He wants her to fix the past. As this is impossible, the American Dream is also impossible to be fully achieved. The balance between a material society and a pastoral ideal place does not exist in Fitzgerald's America. The nation's past proves the unbalance between these two antagonist forces which are the Dream's constitutional base. Idealism, in this sense, cannot be reconciled with materialism, nor pastoral ideals with bourgeoisie values. Therefore, the nation is conceived as being selfish and materialistic as Daisy. Gatsby is condemned to death, but his idealism is not erased.

In chapter VIII, when the narrator describes Gatsby's murder, he says: "the holocaust was complete" (p.169). By recovering the chain of murder mistakes we have: Daisy killed Myrtle- her husband's mistress- supposedly by accident. Then Myrtle's husband -George- kills Gatsby, mistaking him for his wife's murderer and then he kills himself. Checking the meaning of "holocaust" I found that it means a chain of sacrificial murders. It leads us to believe they were all killed in order to save an idea of greatness. In this sense, the hero dies to maintain the Dream alive in the realm of idealization, of a fantasized past. Nick suggests the hero's death was not casual, but causal. By observing Daisy and Tom after one had provoked the murder of the other's supposed lover, Nick describes them as conspiring together:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table. [...] He was talking intently across the table at her, and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her own. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement.

They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken [...] and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy about the picture, and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together (Ibidem, p. 152).

His judgments point to Daisy and Tom as accomplices who planned to get rid of Gatsby. When Nick described the last meeting between Daisy, Tom and Gatsby, which is

also the crucial moment of the narrative, we can observe Tom's angry words: "There are things between Daisy and me that you'll never know, things that neither of us can even forget" (p.139). And on Nick's last meeting with Tom and Daisy, he concludes about the couple:

I couldn't forgive him [Tom], but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified [...], they [Tom and Daisy] smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money, *or whatever it was that kept them together*, and let other people clean up the mess they had made [...] (FITZGERALS, 1975, p. 186, italics mine).

Nick's attitude is then of moral superiority and pity on them: "I shook hands with him [Tom]; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child [...]"(p.186). Nick considers that the tragedy that occurred was not their fault, it was also not personal. Daisy and Tom's attitudes are justified. They are finally compared to children, not responsible for their acts. Tom had only protected his family, his "civilization". Only he, Nick with his "straight honest innate moral consciousness" can understand what they have done. This can be observed in the beginning of the narrative, when he speaks: "[...] a sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally *at birth*" (p.7, italics mine). Nick, as the one who works in the "bond" business, is the one elected to make historical connections. While Gatsby acts, Nick explains, suppresses, and finally creates the romantic atmosphere around Gatsby- the hero- elected to test American equality. Nick interprets the story using a chain of casual events and implicitly suggests that they are not so casual. Americans' history, in his opinion, seems to be the repetition of a failure, or a lie of successful achievements. Nick points skeptically to its inevitability.

The Western American hero believes in the merchandise of success, but he is manipulated by what Nick considers to be historical forces which pull Gatsby back to his place as the embodiment of an impalpable dream. Implicitly, Nick considers society does not deserve Gatsby. There is no place in reality for him. Nick shouts on his last meeting with Gatsby: "They're a rotten crowd [...]. You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (p.160). As being "too good to be true", Nick anticipates Gatsby's ending, which also means his return to the level of pure fantasy. When Gatsby dies, Nick returns to the West.

"In America, the earthly paradise for men is associated, for obvious historical reasons, with the West" (HANDLEY, 2002, p.7). Therefore, moving to the West means looking for a paradise in the past. *The Great Gatsby* is a Western story. It is another version

of the pulp stories, the comic books, movies, and TV shows, in which the cowboy rides in silence through a wilderness of rocks and tumbleweed, always returning to the West, listening to the lessons inherited by his father.

I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all- Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I were all Westerns, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtle unadaptable to Eastern life [...]. After Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eye's power of correction (Ibidem, p.183).

During the narrative, Nick establishes a binary pair: the West and the East. In the end, he concludes that they are all Westerns, in this sense, Americans. The East is haunted in the way it represents a careless degraded high society in America. Nick's tries to recover causality using his memories of the past in order to justify his choice upon an idealized provincial West. It is a way of projecting the recovering of a national identity which is white, male, middle-class, and who honors an idealized American past. Gatsby was used to test the viability of class ascension, but he would have won this game only by marrying Daisy. Marriage is conceived as a bourgeoisie way of social mobility portrayed in the novel.

William Handley argues that "marriage is about property, particularly about the value of one's social property" (HANDLEY, 2002, p. 161). This can be seen in the next passage, when Mrs. Mckee and her friend Myrtle Wilson talk about their marriages. Mrs. Mckee says: "I almost married a little type who'd been after me for years. I knew that he was below me [...]" (FITZGERALD, p.40). Myrtle reflects about the mistake she made by marrying George Wilson: "I married him because I though he was a gentleman [...] I though he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe" (p.41).

From Myrtle's point of view, her husband's problem is that he was poorer that she thought he was when she married him. "He borrowed somebody's suit to get married in, and never even told me about it, and the man came after it one day when he [George] was out [...] I gave it to him and then I laid down and cried" (p. 41).

Fitzgerald denounces how marriages are financial investments. They are seen as a social contract in the novel. Superficially, there is the love story and nothing else matters. But, since the novel is retrospective, it leads the reader to look back in order to understand the future events of the narrative. History, for Fitzgerald, is a movement back and forth, it is cyclical, dialectical. The democratic opportunities in America are denounced as being not so

democratic. And social mobility is limited by place- identity borders. Only by a symbolic death and rebirth through class movement can one leave an old class, ethnic, racial self behind to become a better capitalist and, in this sense, a better American. In the novel, there is no disruption of the *status quo*, there are only characters trying to merge within it. This means that barriers between black and white, rich and poor are not transposed. Nick feels disgusted, but he never really challenges nor questions Tom's convictions. If the American Dream is based on a marriage between idealism and materialism, it fails. Nick never fully rejects materialism, he just runs home disillusioned by its complexity, immorality and emptiness.

4. The Allegorical Representation in *The Great Gatsby*

In the dispersal of a single History, whose omniscient work legislates the world, I begin to hear composite voices crossing and disturbing the path and patterns of the once seemingly ineluctable onrush of progress. In the movement from concentrated sight to dispersed sound, from the 'neutral' gaze to the interference of hearing, from the discriminating eye to the incidental ear, I abandon a fixed (ad) vantage for a mobile and exposed politics of listening- for a 'truth' that is always becoming (CHAMBERS, 1996, p. 51).

Literary tradition is mediated by an institutional context. Therefore, it contains an *intra-literary* dimension. This means that every literary work is produced within a specific historical definition and conditions of possibility. The cultural context determines what kind of value will be attributed to each writing, who it might have as an audience, what kind of attention will be paid to it and what status, in the extra-diegetic world, the author can win by producing such writing.

Fitzgerald's conviction about the irreconcilable contradictions within the American Dream presents *The Great Gatsby* as a novel based on the imbalance between gender, race, class, and ethnic relations. The narrative presents a tension regarding the presence of non-North European descendents in the remapping of urban landscape of America. It also presents the fear of losing boundaries between the old stock white Anglo-Saxon Americans and the new rich. The incongruities between pastoral and bourgeois ideals, idealism and materialism, self-made men and greed are some of the contradicting elements which compose an iconographic representation of the American Dream in the novel. Fitzgerald creates a mystic atmosphere in which parallel levels of meaning are stuck together and move parallelly in a coherent mode. The richness of images, similes, and metaphors create a ghostly world which melts in the air right before the end of the narrative. Its effect is, among others, the sensation that the narrative works in order to repeat a ritualistic pattern, in which the narrator knows its ending in advance, but needs to tell the story in order to make it re-signify by adding a mystic brightness to it. The narrative reinscribes the *greatness* of Gatsby in an ironic pejorative mode, as a parody of the self-made man. Simultaneously, there is also a positive valorization of Gatsby's idealism, as a trace that has been subjugated in the American Dream of success in the 20s.

The use of language, of myth, of official historic factuality and imaginary geographic division spread a way of seeing the narrative as the construction of Gatsby's

greatness. But Nick's ironic point of view remains as a hint to ask oneself what Gatsby actually represents. He achieves his greatness through his "sacrificial" death. However, the incongruities, the lapses, the silences, the voices of secondary characters may also receive an opportunity of expression, of study. Along with Daisy's arrogance and sophistication, there lies her unhappy life as a wife; along Nick's moral indignation, there lies his skepticism and conformism; along Myrtle's vitality, there lies her dissatisfaction with her life surrounded by poverty, behind George Wilson's ghostly air and apathy, there lies a world of silences and intolerance. The novel re-inscribes the value of a nation, of the West standing for the United States of America, but it also exposes its wounds, as, for instance, the existence of economically deficient suburbs. It carries the nation's pragmatic inability to understand the others, specially the ones who are not included in a WASP model. The novel exposes explicitly social distinctions in a society, whose division is based on greed, tradition and ownership of money. The Middle-West is conceived as the nest of moral virtue, as a refuge from corruption. It is the only holy place in the novel, which obviously represents a political position.

4.1 Conceptualizing Allegory: Theory and Practice

Allegory in a traditional common sense usage is described as an extended metaphor²⁷ since it is a representation conveying a meaning other than the literal one. When we read a story and conclude that there is another meaning, parallel to the surface meaning, and that this story carries both together, then we may say we have read an allegorical work. The allegorical author's formula runs something like "by this, I also mean that". In painting and sculpture we can find great allegories. Boiticelli's *Primavera* is a famous allegorical painting. The female figure of *Justice*, blindfolded and carrying a scale is allegorical. Drawings conveying a moral lesson were usually accompanied by a verse which commented on their significance.

Observing literary allegory, an entire work may be allegorical, or a work may contain one or more allegorical episodes. Some examples of allegorical works are: Spenser's

²⁷ Metaphor is based on a combination of two Greek words meaning "to carry over" or "to carry across". It is a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea used in the place of another by way of suggesting a

Fairie Queene, Bunyan's fable²⁸ *Pilgrim's Progress*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The first book of Oliver Swift's *Gulliver Travels* is a political allegory; his *Tale of a Tub* is a religious one. Incidental allegory is found in Book Two of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is based on the biblical text, which presents an allegory of Sin and Death. Allegory is preferred instead of fable or parable²⁹ when the story is of greater length, not necessarily restricted to one single idea, and less concerned with teaching. It is used to expose what the writer sees as a deplorable situation, or to hold enemies up to ridicule. Each of the details of a story represent something else. Myths are other forms of allegory. They are formulated to explain why our world is as it is, why things happen as they do. All myths can be read at more than one level, having meanings to convey in addition to the surface ones.

According to Augus Fletcher (1964), allegory seems to be always incomplete. It repeats the search for lost origins and the desire for wisdom. The dream-vision is a characteristic framing and opening device of allegory. Psychoanalysis readily assimilated the great archetypes of allegorical imagery into its discourse. To this extent, desire is valued as a theme and a structuring principle. Allegory, in this sense, represents the distance between signifier and signified. According to Jakobson (1971) it is the supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function, which does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous.

These dialectic impressions are created allegorically in the novel. In this sense, the novel might be considered an allegorical narrative. Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) concept of allegory provides elements that justify this statement. Benjamin studied the influence of technological innovations upon art and society, art's autonomy, the function of the narrator, besides other elements linked also to philosophy and history at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. He explained this period based on his study of Baudelaire's poetical work, and on Proust, Kafka, among others. He pointed to the recurrence of allegorical

likeness or analogy between them. The metaphor has at least two fixed meanings: the literal and the other that it stands for or suggests (MURRAY, 1978, p. 83).

²⁸ Fable is a moral short story, in which talking animals and their activities are presented as parallels with human being's behavior (Ibidem, p. 5).

²⁹ Parable is familiar to the readers of the Gospels, being the means used by Catholics to teach. It is a more appropriate name for a short illustrative story designed to answer a single question or to point one definite moral. A parable is created to teach, as an efficient indirect mode. The characters do not stand for anybody or anything else (Ibidem, p.5).

figures in modernity. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977) he fully conceives and examines the concept of allegory.

In his book, Benjamin mentions that allegory was much more natural to Renaissance writers than to Modern ones. The Renaissance view of the Universe, in terms of various levels of correspondences, encouraged the tendency to discover relationships in every direction, and to express one thing in terms of another, thereby cultivating all forms of allegory. It has been compared to a description in code. In this sense, the reader needs to discover what the persons or events in the story stand for. It is compared to a world of dreams in which probability matters little.

Intimately bound to a mode of writing that resembles the pictographic script-a hieroglyph- which carries along a codified meaning, allegory³⁰ encompasses and expresses the baroque/modern view of the world (BENJAMIN, 1977, p. 183).

According to the author, it seems difficult to distinguish *allegory* from *symbol*. To this extent, Benjamin provides an explanation. According to him, in the Classical Age- which includes the Renaissance and Neo-Classicism, the symbol reflects the human being's insertion in nature. "The relationship between the individual and the world is one of harmony, order and beauty" (BENJAMIN apud CAMPELLO, 1993, p.30). The human sphere is considered an extension of the divine one. Classical art maintains the secular conception that "every work of art must express, in its own way, the whole of reality human beings are able to understand" (Ibidem, 31). The writer's goal is to seize what is essential and what transcends, but there is also the desire of perpetuating the *status quo*. The symbol is then, "the most satisfactory means to represent such vision of classical wholeness" (Ibidem, p.31). It represents a strict relation between a concept and an idea, in the sense that what really matters is the idea that is bound to the symbol.

During Romanticism, the symbol, rather than the allegory, was given priority, whereas allegory was neither valued nor understood. In the nineteenth century, W. B. Yeats (1865-1959), in his critical work proposes a distinction between symbolism and allegory: "Symbolism is the only possible expression of some otherwise inexpressible spiritual essence, while allegory is an arbitrary translation that has already been expressed in other terms" (YEATS apud MURRAY, 1978, p.162). Many theorists during Romanticism formulated

³⁰ According to its etymology, *allegory* means to "say the other." In it, every element means something else, something different from the reality its literal sense shows us (MURRAY, 1978, p.1).

theories on the symbol, among them Creuzer. He introduced the category of time to the pair-symbol/ allegory. According to him, “Whereas there is momentary totality in the symbol, there is a progression in a series of moments in the allegory” (GREUZER apud BENJAMIN, 1977, p.187). Greuzer believed that the conception of allegory brought with it the development of the myth. In this sense, Benjamin considers that Creuzer was closely followed by Görres’s theoretical precepts. He added that allegory is an “image which progresses” (Ibidem, p.187). So it is possible to detect the violent dialectical movement within the allegorical depths.

Benjamin blames romantic aesthetics for having subjected the philosophy of art to a false concept of symbol³¹ that provoked the desolation of modern art criticism. He argues that in Romanticism, “the symbol is taken out of its theological sphere, by displacing the relations of transcendence invested in the medieval and classical symbol to the relation of indivisible unity between form and content” (BENJAMIN, 1977, p.185). Classicism and Romanticism undervalued allegory as the means that carries on a view that accounts for a situation of crisis. But according to Benjamin: “The symbol is coherent and predictable, while in allegory there is no essentiality in the relationship between idea and concept” (Ibidem, p.162).

4.2 Temporality in the Novel: Retrospection as Projection

The dialectical idea embedded in the American Dream impels the individual towards a promising future, but makes him melancholic, longing for a past unity. Benjamin explains this feeling as the result of the loss of what he calls “aura”. According to him, the 20th century starts in an atmosphere of transitoriness.

As the individual loses faith in oneself, in others and in the entire world, the harmony between the human and divine spheres, between religion and justice, and between intellectual and moral values is substituted by the paradox (BENJAMIN,1977, p. 167).

³¹ Literary symbolism comes about when the objects signified by the words stand for things other than themselves. Certain objects are commonly associated with fixed qualities or ideas: the cross with Christianity, the eagle with heroism, the rising sun with birth, the setting sun with death, the dove with peace, and so on. There is also the symbolism of colors. Color symbols have no fixed meaning, but derive their significance from a context: green may represent innocence, hope or Irish patriotism. Symbolism may be described as the art of expressing emotions not by describing them directly nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are by re-creating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols (MURRAY, 1978,p. 156-157).

The outbreak of historical crisis with the two World Wars created the collapse of a system of beliefs. Continuity and permanence are replaced by movement and fast changes, even in the perception of time. The industrial society which began in the 19th century brought technical improvements that altered the relation between the work of art and its context of production. The work of art achieved its autonomy as an aesthetic value, but it also started to be conceived as a commodity whose appreciation lost public domain to become restricted to a privileged class. According to Benjamin's perception, the work of art lost its ritual value and acquired an exchange value. Analogically, all human experiences were fragmented. Modernity prioritised information and not communication. In this sense, the symbolic status of language was replaced by the need to inform.

The 20th century also experienced a different perception of *time*. According to Benjamin, its passage does not necessarily add anything to one's memory because society is subjugated to the myth of progress, the desire of looking forward ceaselessly. Time is a process of repeating actions, it is synchronic, not diachronic. Benjamin conceives the passage of time as empty moments in succession. Thus, the only possible experience in modernity is the experience of shock. This is felt because a past experience can be momentarily linked to an object which exists in the present time. In this sense, the past can be resurrected in the object by the experience of shocking. Benjamin's conception of time is not chronological, but cyclical, in the way that material objects carry a metaphysical meaning that the author calls *truth*. It can be recovered, but only in moments of extreme sensorial provocation. Objects carry an aura, which is conceived as the unrepeatable presence of a distance. There is a dialectical parallelism in his concept of aura which links proximity and distance. Feeling this aura is a kind of religious experience. The word religion is derived from a latin word- *religio* and the verb *religare*, which represents the re-establishing of a link between the human and the spirit, the subject and the object, the physical and metaphysical. It represents the interference of the "divine" order over the material world. What Benjamin proposes is the existence of a link between what is socially conceived as sacred and what is profane, between the spiritual and its material manifestation.

This dialectical experience can be observed in *The Great Gatsby*. Nick, the narrator, embodies a view of History that is similar to Walter Benjamin's who observed emblematic marks of the past in present objects. The novel presents a condensed view which links past,

present, and future simultaneously in space. It expresses the melancholic and alienated feeling present in the bourgeois atmosphere in the beginning of the 20th century.

In the ninth theses of the essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1939) Benjamin, inspired by a Paul Klee painting called *Angelus Novus*, describes the course of human history as one which accumulates destruction.

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistible propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward (BENJAMIN, 1985, p.226).

He presents an allegorical description of the painting in which he sees that the *angel* turns his backside to the future and faces the past with horror. The angel is shocked by the view of the amount of ruins that the past accumulates. The celestial figure cannot turn away because the force of progress impels him to move in the direction of the future. But he still gazes at the past. He helplessly faces the catastrophe of human history. Benjamin’s view of history is represented allegorically. He suggests that the connection between past, present and future is not linear. The past and the present are concentrated in similes, which are allegorical images. In his study of Proust, for example, he distinguishes memory from memorization. While *memory* is what protects our impressions about the past, *memorization* is what disrupts these impressions in order to force them to re-signify.

In his conception of history, there is no place for authentic experiences. There are only experiences of shock [*chockerlebnis*] as consequences of the decline of the aura. The shocks annul the false continuity of experience. Benjamin projects his perception about Modernity in the figure of the angel. In the novel, Nick’s perception follows the same pattern, and he faces the American society of the 20ths. He expresses his indignation, but he stands passive by facing the decay of what he conceives as moral values in the hands of high society. His narrative presents a ghostly world with a dialectical function. It carries the images of a collective wish and a collective question: What happened with the American Dream?

There is an unbalance between pastoral ideals and materialism represented in the novel. Gender, racial and ethnic conflicts are associated to this dualism. The narrative expresses America’s internal conflicts about marriage, breeding, social position, the

importance of money, the meaning of success. It challenges the readers because it expresses simultaneously the end of the Dream and its metaphysical resurrection embodied in all Americans. It shifts from Gatsby to a collective dimension. There is a re-investment in the American Dream as a mode of continuous change. Gatsby's death achieves the allegorical level. In this sense, he dies heroically in order to maintain the Dream alive reinforcing the reader's idealism in a huge collective enterprise called The American Dream.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before of us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter- to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further ... And one fine morning...

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past (p.188).

Some of allegorical elements present in the novel are: the dialectic representation of time, the social euphoria with materialism, and the tension brought by the disbelief in idealism in the post-war period. The allegorical gaze conquers the myth of an arcaic past, a paradise lost, which is conceived as a superficial illusion, a ghostly dream, though still desirable. The novel exposes the deification of commodities. Gatsby's shirts and the objects of his house acquire a spiritualized meaning due to Daisy's gaze:

He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real (FITZGERALD, p.98).

Nick observes the metaphysical presence in material elements in a "world material without being real" (p.168). He is a dialectical figure who can be compared to Benjamin's *flaneur*, identified in Baudelaire's poetical work. The narrator observes life in society, but his melancholic gaze induces him to feelings of uncanny and alienation.

Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something- an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as through there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was incommunicable forever" (p. 118).

In every present moment distinct time dimensions are inter-related. Different genealogical *times* coexist and, in the previous statement, Nick senses the connection between the present and the past, though his memory fails to recover it, in the sense that he is

not able to properly communicate his perception. The borders between present and past are momentarily shaken, but not ruptured, and the result is incomunicability. It represents Nick's incapacity to say what is uncanny in Gatsby and Daisy's connection, that it was already fated to perish. This "truth" melts in the air as in a dream. There is the impossibility of fully conceiving the past, because impressions about it are created in the present. The narrative takes place in the "spring of twenty-two" (p. 9), but Nick links it to distinct periods. He feels the metaphysical presence of Gatsby's guests in his empty house:

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 be 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-eyed man break into ghostly laughter (p. 98).

The excerpt above represents the impossibility of any simple, authoritative, totalising point of view in the novel. Nick is a skeptic and he feels contradictions in the air. This can be observed in his description of Gatsby, when he links religiosity to immorality; fantasy to reality, fragileness to security, conceiving Gatsby as the ideal American self-made man:

He was a son of God [...] – and he must be about His Father's business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty [...]

For over a year he had been beating his way along the south shore of Lake Superior as a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher or in any other capacity that brought him food and bed. His brown, hardening body lived naturally through the half-fierce, half-lazy work of the bracing days. He knew women early, and since they spoiled him he became contemptuous of them, of young virgins because they were ignorant, of the other because they were hysterical about things which in his overwhelming self-absorption he took for granted.

But his hearth was in a constant, turbulent riot. The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night. A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the washstand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor. Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene and oblivious embrace. For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing (p. 105- 106).

There is also a suggestive connection between a myth of origin, based on idealism, and material possessions. The *fairy's wing* stands for a belief in Manifest Destiny³², in

³² "Manifest Destiny" is conceived as the belief that American's progress was divinely ordained. Western settlements were conceived as being inevitable (HANLDEY, 2002, p.162). See ANNEX: A National Allegory.

American Exceptionalism³³ and in the American Dream³⁴. And the *rock of the world* stands for material possessions.

The novel is a text organized by the projection of metaphoric equivalence onto metonymic succession. It presents a self-contained structure of relations, in which elements are manipulated as in a game. The text structure corresponds to other structures of experience-psychological, physical, metaphysical and literary- from which the text derives its own authority and indeed much of its literary interest. For instance, Jordan, Daisy and Myrtle are essential figures which represent, at one level, stereotyping distinctions among women. At another level, they represent a unified presence called “woman”. As one level carries the other, all women are negatively conceived as deceitful and morally degraded.

Distanced at the beginning from its source, allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory (FINEMAN, 1981, p. 45).

Benjamin considers that every work of art is a montage of moments in time, which presents a version of the past in an apparently unified and continuous form. According to him, the allegorical mode of expression picks up the emptiness experienced by the *flaneur*. He is the one who, embodied in Nick, realizes a quality of *divine* mission in Gatsby’s quest of recovering an extremely intense experience from the past in order to revive it in the present. Gatsby’s mission is to recover the mystic and religious meaning in the American Dream. But dreams are bound to changes. The 19th century transcendentalist’s idea of the American Dream focused on reaching one’s goals by honesty and hardworking is replaced, in the 20th century, by the idea of achieving success by way of illegal money. Materialistic possessions are explicitly required for a person to be accepted in American society besides implicit racial and ethnic requirements. In the novel, Fitzgerald uses a process of allegorical montage in order to expose this American wound.

Jay Gatsby, following Benjamin Franklin’s lessons when preparing schedules, has prepared himself to embody North-American history. Nick, the middle-class narrator

³³ “American Exceptionalism” is the notion that Americans live in a land apart where they can begin the world again. The ideal is to fight abroad and to return home after a new conquest.

³⁴ The “American Dream” is here conceived as the belief in endless progress, self-creating, achievement and success.

comprehends from the beginning the awful future reserved for Gatsby because the hero's story was already inscribed in History: the connection between spiritual idealization and material possessions was in decline in the period between the two World Wars. The USA were financially benefitted by the wars, but simultaneously, the loss of idealism spread among people. Nick knows what happens to a middle-class individual who is illuded about America, and about entering in a world in which he/she will not be accepted. Nor can Daisy leave this upper-class' world. Nick is the narrator of the allegory, which he calls "a story of the West" (p.183). He knows about the infinite hope of the frontier spirit, and he also has witnessed the corruption of the American promise of equality for all.

According to Lionel Trilling³⁵ "Fitzgerald transcends the novel of Jazz Age, because he takes the given moment as a moral fact" (MIZENER, 1955, p.11). Gatsby needs Daisy; and this need will destroy him. But his battle is unavoidable. She becomes his *holy-grail*. Gatsby personifies the incongruity between pastoral and bourgeois ideals. He is a pastoral man in a bourgeois capitalist society. Dislocated in time and impelled by an "instinct towards his future glory" (p. 106) , he suffers the consequences of a fragmented society in which the individual tries to reach fulfillment, but his dreams and reality are incompatible. Only at the most superficial level, do we have the story of Jay Gatsby's romantic love and pursuit of Daisy Buchanan.

Nick has a physical proximity to the main character and he serves as his confident. He can observe the action firsthand. He can collect more details about the story he is telling because he follows the characters to their distinct settings. Nick's narrative carries the novel's more abstract concern with idealism. Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (p.105). He creates "the Great Gatsby" from the raw material of his early self, James Gatz, and from a boundless imagination, an embodied spirit capable of anything. When, at last, Gatsby kisses Daisy he believes that he "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (p.116). At this moment, Gatsby achieves a mythical sphere, personifying "the son of God". The ideal world, in Gatsby's case, shatters in the face of the *real* one. It has, of course, happened before with Dutch sailors who "for a transitory and enchanted moment" contemplated the "fresh green breast of the new world" (FITZGERALD, p.187). While Gatsby is conceived as the owner of

³⁵ See TRILLING, Lionel. "F. Scott Fitzgerald" (1945). In: MIZENER, Arthur, ed. *F. Scott Fitzgerald: Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, N. J. 1955 p.11-20

time, Daisy represents a space which already has an owner- Tom. There is the high-class society warning the middle-class fellow that the *green land* is not free any longer.

Nick provides a parallelism between a metaphysical idealized world projected upon reality. "And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes" (FITZGERALD, p.187). In this universe, past, present and future converge simultaneously in the same space. The intricate weaving of the various stories within *The Great Gatsby* is accomplished through a complex symbolic substructure of the narrative. The green light, which carries meaning at every level of the story - as Gatsby's go-ahead sign, as money, as the "green breast of the new world" (p.187), as springtime - is strategically placed in chapters one, five, and nine. The eyes of T.J. Eckleburg " dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground" (p.29) - which is the wasteland that America has become - and their empty gaze appears at crucial moments such as when Tom visits his mistress in the Valley of Ashes and before and after her death. The advertisement functions as a reminder that God has been replaced by fading signs of American materialism.

The sustained good driver/bad driver metaphor suggests a parallel between morality and immorality, responsibility and carelessness. It can be observed when Daisy runs over Myrtle and will not stop to accept responsibility. When Jordan Baker -whose name combines two automobile brands from the 1920's - wears her careless driving as a symbol of status, Nick states " I saw that [...] she felt safer on a place where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurable dishonest" (p.64). Owl Eyes, the drunken philosopher in Gatsby's library realizes in surprise that Gatsby's books are real, not only covers to represent status. After he leaves Gatsby's house, he is involved in a car accident. He shows up again at his funeral to call him "the poor son of a bitch". They, as well as Daisy, appear as metaphysical entities in trouble with the use of machines. They live in a degraded world which lost its link with Nick's high praised conception of morality. By using these motifs, Fitzgerald creates an allegorical correspondence between distinct elements, which merge in specific moments.

Historically, allegory, as emblematic writing, was suitable to hide political axioms that enclosed a "truth", to deceive the Church and to function as a repository of knowledge, considering that the allegorical figure always reports itself to another reality. The work of art was pragmatically used to express a forbidden idea.

In an allegory, the object is incapable of emanating any meaning or significance of its own. It acquires the meaning the allegorist wants it to exhibit. So, the object displaced from its original context is set in a new one. Only there- in the work of art- it becomes meaningful, being manipulated by the writer's imagination.

The allegorical object, however can only be considered in itself an object worthy of knowledge through a visual image, which contains a mystic element. At the same time, the image is a ruin that holds imperfection, it is a fragment. "The artist imprints the meaning in the image and it becomes an emblem of the knowledge he venerates" (BENJAMIN,1977, p.206). For Benjamin, every object is a fragment – a ruin- whose totality is lost forever in the past. The art of fragmentation examines alienation, solitude, anxiety and isolation, and its reaction is a profound feeling of melancholy³⁶. This can be seen when Nick expresses Gatsby's feeling about the meaning of the "green light on Daisy's dock" (p. 100). Nick says:

Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever [...] Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects has diminished by one (p.100).

When the woman who stands for the object- the light- is achieved, the object loses its metaphysical power to represent something else. According to Benjamin, in this process of desacralization, the sublime appears, a sublime that, due to exaggeration, becomes the grotesque³⁷. It was expressed in Baroque times and revived in Modernity. Nick, analyzing Daisy's behavior, concludes: "how grotesque thing a rose could be" (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.186). When she also loses her metaphorical power, she stands for a white daisy with a corrupted yellow center. The representation of hope, which was once associated to the green light, ends up demystified by its link to money and to high-class possessions. In the same sense, the "green breast of the new world", which was once associated to the American land, ends up reduced to a "voice full of money". These distinct elements are momentarily linked in Daisy's image.

There is the impossibility of disconnection between dialectics and contradiction within the allegorical field. The dialectic of the allegorical model appears through the

³⁶ *Melancholy* is understood as a historical attitude with which the allegorist contemplates both the sacred and the mundane world at the same time. The only pleasure the melancholic permits himself is allegory (BENJAMIN, 1977, p. 207).

³⁷ The term *grotesque* means the "underground phantasmagoria, the occult and spectral substratum, which the allegory codifies in its profound spheres of significance" (*Ibidem*, p.200).

collection, the way in which the objects are arranged, and the peculiar paradoxical distribution of instruments- the structure. The same element is good and bad. In this sense, women are represented as necessary, but destructive. They are saintly and profane. Nothing is pure anymore, every thing is contaminated. "Dialectically, allegory intends to guarantee the sacred character of the script in conflict with a profane comprehensibility" (BENJAMIN,1977, p. 207). The fragment is then the most important element because it is not occult. Daisy's holy image is described as a fragment, an empty cover with no substance. The fragment assumes huge proportions, mainly because of its capacity to point to something different.

Another important dualism, is the one involving the meaning(s) of the West and the East. They are considered by Sacvan Bercovith as "polarities within the same ideological spectrum" (1986, p. 420). William Handley suggests that they represent a direction, not a stable place. In this sense, there is no specific geographic correspondence, but they are "names given to an identity" (HANDLEY, 2002, p .169). The West is a national myth, it is a fantasy of identity. Similarly, the East is also a direction, an opposition, its locality depends on the meaning of the West. They are words which represent an ideology.

According to Handley, this duality has its roots in the Puritan discourse, for "they [the Puritans] cannot escape from God's commission, and they feel attracted by the exotic other. The only possible solution to maintain the borders is the setting of binary oppositions" (HANDLEY, 2002, p.163). In the novel, these binary oppositions are not fixed entities and may even be contradictory. There are moments when the West Egg represents the American middle-class ideal place. And, in others, as in the end, the Middle-West acquires this metaphysical meaning of an ideal place, and stands for America.

From the allegorical perspective, the profane world- Fitzgerald's corrupt high-class society of the 20s - goes through a mechanism of elevation and devaluation at the same time. East society and its aristocratic values are focused and also conceived as meaningless. Gatsby dies to remain alive. Tom and Daisy belong to East, but they end up being conceived as Westerners. The dialectical process manages to solve the conflict between perishable and eternal things. "It rescues the object from death" (BENJAMIN, 1977, p.207). The reader *knows* from the title that Gatsby is the hero, but the narrator, Nick, makes us *feel* what it means thought the narrative. A personal character stands for a national experience, and sensations of pity and redemption are carried with him as being national.

The dialect doctrine of allegory points to ambiguity as its main quality. There is no clear connection between meaning and sign, there are many obscurities:

The display of history as the universal history of suffering is meaningful only in the stations of its decline [...]. The greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death [...] the history told in the ruins accounts for what could have been but was not. Thus the writers concentrate on decaying objects. History is seen on the decay. And there is beauty found in the ruins (BENJAMIN, 1977, p. 166).

In the process of allegorical reading, the method is digression. Each layer of significance brings the opportunity to decipher another layer. It's the rebuilding of an original narrative, that is always fluid. An allegory proposes a link among a signified that is apparent and another which lies underneath, but it is not less important. There are many levels of interpretation and their gaps are filled by the reader's imagination. There lies Fitzgerald's greatness as a writer. He does not solve contradictions. Instead, he manages to make them move together in the development of the narrative. For instance, when Nick says to Gatsby: "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together", and right after, he says: "I disapproved of him [Gatsby] from beginning to end" (FITZGERALD, 1975, p. 160) his speech seems to contradict itself. The beginning of the narrative is not less contradicting. Nick introduces: "Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn" (p. 8). Right after that, he praises Gatsby's personality and his "extraordinary gift for hope" (p. 8), only to conclude that, "Gatsby turned out all right at the end" (p.8). But, from the narrative, we know that he ends up unfairly murdered. Nick admires and scorns him. He expresses a relation of narcissistic superiority in relation to the other³⁸. We need to suspect Nick's irony and to consider that he praises Gatsby as an idea, not as a person.

Gatsby can be recognized as a personification of the modern wish, from a male point of view. In a patriarchal context, he did not achieve his ideal because he wanted more from a woman, and from a country, than she or it could provide. He wished for substance, consistency, security. He wished to own a place because he believed himself the owner of time. He ends up being nowhere and everywhere. What remains is a wish for eternal return to a garden of Eden "above the trees". Where is this place? According to the narrative, for non-

³⁸ The invention of the "other" has been used to express a self-identity. According to Lacan, "when the child sees his/her image in the mirror, she/he starts to project a certain unity into the fragmented self-image producing a fictional ego. However, the idea of wholeness is only an illusion. The child begins to form a sense of self based on the external image seen in the mirror, and thus the self is a fantasy based on an opposition in relation to the other. In the symbolic stage, the child is introduced to language. It is here that the child creates the concept of otherness as a structural possibility and she/he discovers that other can disappear. The other can then be exterminated as a solution to deny the differences" (LACAN apud GREENBLATT, 1981, p. 47).

Americans, it stands for America; for Americans, it stands for the Middle -West and the Middle- Class.

4.3. The Pastoral Idea in America and its Incorporation in the American Dream

My special concern now is to present how the pastoral idea has been incorporated in a powerful metaphor of contradictions- a way of ordering meaning and values that appear allegorically in *The Great Gatsby*.

According to Murray (1978), pastoral poems are among the oldest and the most universal of literary forms. In the third century B. C. the Greek poet Theocritus was writing pastoral poems describing the lives of Sicilian shepherds. “His pastorals, and those of Virgil who imitated them, became models for all subsequent writers in the form” (MURRAY, p.111).

In the development of pastoral poems, pastoral life was presented in terms of the myth of the lost golden age. Johan Huizinga (1966) describes “No other single illusion has charmed humanity for so long and with such and ever fresh splendor as the illusion of the pining shepherd’s pipe and surprised nymphs in rustling woods and murmuring brooks. It is the golden age brought to life” (HUIZINGA apud MURRAY, p. 112). The golden age describes a time in which men lived in a state of perfect happiness, innocent of evil tendencies and free from cares and troubles.

In the beginning was the golden age, when men of their own accord, without threat of punishment, without laws, maintained good faith and did what was right. There were no penalties to be afraid of, no bronze tables were erected, carrying threats of legal action, no crowd of wrongdoers, anxious for mercy, trembled before the face of their judge: indeed there were no judges, men lived securely without them [...] People enjoyed leisurely and peaceful existence, and had no use for soldiers. The world itself [...] produced all things spontaneously, and men were content with foods that grew without cultivation (*The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, Translated by Mary M. Innes, 1955 In: MURRAY, p.112).

Gatsby is the ideal man who embodies this spirit. He is also understood as representing Nick's unconscious³⁹ projection in his longing for an imaginary ideal past.

According to Murray, the biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve and of their idyllic life in Eden has a central place in the literature of the golden age. Milton's celebration of the theme of the golden world is one of the glories of English pastoral poetry. "Since the life of shepherds was attended with more tranquility than any other rural employment, the poets chose to introduce their Persons, from whom it received the name of Pastoral" (MURRAY, 1978, p.111).

During the seventeenth century Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Marvell's *Garden* were famous pastoral poems. The Elizabethan idea of America was an image of a virgin land, with a landscape untouched by history, which would become an immense garden of incredible abundance as a site for a new golden age.

The idea of redemptive journey away from society into the direction of nature was created as a prophetic ideal. It offered a chance for a temporary return to first things. Temporary exile from the city was a renewal. Thus, the pastoral dream was renewed and projected into the future. Besides this, while the classical pastoralist indulged in nostalgia, the Renaissance one concerned himself more openly in expressing his hatred of his own times. Consequently, "it became the form in which one wrote satire" (MURRAY, 1978, p.114).

Leo Marx in his book *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) provides a portrayal of the evolution of Pastoral Idealism in America. He states that it was during the Renaissance that painters discovered the garden. There was an excitement felt in Europe about the New World, which would necessarily become Arcadia. Indians of Virginia were associated with shepherds of the pastoral. Adam Smith affirmed "the master symbol is not a static emblem of private felicity but a grand collective enterprise" (In: MARX, 1964, p. 143) There he saw a huge mythic investment, a collective representation. It was the myth of the garden.

³⁹ Lacan defines the unconscious as the discourse of the other. In the etymology of allegory we have other = to speak. "Psychoanalysis is described as the science whose concern is the split in the subject occasioned by the subject's accession to language. It precisely the loss of the self to the self, which we refer when we speak of the function of the unconscious. For Lacan the psyche is divided when it enters language. This famous Lacanian barring of the subject- the loss of being that comes from re-presenting oneself in language as a meaning, correlative with the formation of the unconscious and the desire, the Oedipeanization of the subjects, and the acquisition of a place in the cultural order through the recognition of the Name of the Father- is what makes the psyche a critical allegory of itself and is what justifies psychoanalysis as the allegory of that allegory. For it is in search of the meaning of this division of the subject through the dialectics of desire, bought on by the structurality of the logos, that psychoanalysis finds its own project and its own initiatory desire" (FINEMAN, 1981, p. 47).

The pastoral represented the reconciliation of the savage and the rational, the natural and the civilized. In the great chain of being we have the animal occupying a lower position and the intellectual- divine occupying a higher position. Humanity is between these extremes. So the middle state is considered the best position. The middle state in the 18th century would be a rural order that stood between the wilderness and urban life. In 1783, Hugh Blair made the connection between the “middle state theory” (MARX, 1964, p.99) and the pastoral explicit. His question was: “ If the middle landscape existed once, why not again?” (Ibidem, p. 99).

As a result, for three centuries Englishmen projected their dreams upon the New World. In 1785, a pamphlet⁴⁰ entitled *The Golden Age* was published. The author and the place of publication were not mentioned, but the connection between America and the pastoral idea was clear. It gave common men/women the hope to achieve in America what in Europe was reserved for another class.

Leo Marx mentions a famous book, *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), that was written by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. He projected the old pastoral idea with a new vocabulary on the American scene. There is the mythic idea of the middle link. In it, the farmer reaffirms the ideal of the middle landscape, by choosing the West, which represents the uncultivated land, the wilderness. On the other hand, the East represents urban life. According to Crèvecoeur, we can face the substitutions: Arcadia became North- America, the shepherd turn into the independent, democratic husband. He presents a static view of history. In it, America is considered a refuge from History, a timeless paradise. It is described as a peaceful, lovely, classless, beautiful pasture. The farmer would peacefully dominate nature using machines which represent a reconciliation between the bucolic ideals and the city.

In the eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson wrote *Notes on Virginia* (1785), states Leo Marx. This was when the pastoral hope moved from abstract ideology to a representation of reality. The idea of retirement from the busy world to the pleasures of rural life, the evocation of lost innocence and longing for a happier age remained. “Landscape painting

⁴⁰ The pamphlet describes a strictly honest American . He had fought against England during the war and anxious about the future of his countrymen, he had a vision, in which angels appear to say that he is himself an American guardian, and his will be a prophetic view. The angel carries the man called Celadon to a high mountain in the center of American land. In East he sees huge cities and farms. In West he sees an unspoiled vast terrain where Indians and beast live [...] where the poor will have a place to develop their capacities. The pamphlet ends with an idea of eternal progress and American spreading over the earth. *The Golden Age* is a statement of the pastoral idea of America (MARX, 1964, p.106-107).

achieved popularity, as Renaissance had brought those images of perfect harmony between man and nature” (MARX, p. 89).

Jefferson brought the idea of the rural as the moral center of democratic society. He said: “We should avoid wars, and all our citizens would be husbandmen” (Ibidem, p. 134). But dependence upon European manufactures made things change. There was the husbandman against the economist. There was a parallel between independence and dependence upon Europe (Ibidem, p. 127). Jefferson believed that political independence requires economic self-sufficiency. In this period, he warned against sending young Americans to Europe. People were encouraged to buy American raw products, creating a patriotic ideal. He projected a native version of an ancient hope: a rural republic. He wanted to hold the moral values of agrarian society and yet believed in progress. By the time of the industrial revolution in Europe, America was invaded by the new technologies that were incorporated not only in urban life, but also in the countryside. He admitted that America might engage in commerce and manufacturing, but he was against the factory system. His future vision contained a tragic ambivalence: an agricultural nation invaded by manufacturing. Jefferson’s intention was a dialectical one. He tried to adjust the middle landscape ideal pushing it ahead into an unknown future. The ideal was a middle term between primitivism and over-civilization.

However, Marx affirms that America was taking another direction, because it could not avoid industrialization. Then, strategically, the American utopian dream was shifted from the future to the past. Jefferson could not give entire credibility to the myth of the garden, nor could he repudiate it. His time- the Old Republic- produced the Western stories. They were an attempt to idealize the wilderness because of what could be made of it: a rural terrain of peace and happiness, protected from the cruel consequences of industrialization.

The West is not simple a geographical category, but rather a name which always associates itself with those regions that appear economically superior [...] The historical predicate is translated into a geographical one and vice versa. (HALL, 1996, p. 333).

Marx argues that, in the American West, there was a huge availability of land. People were dispersed in areas too large to be a market for manufactures. There was an attempt to expand by creating new farmers. Besides this, the two economic depressions, one in 1818 and the other in 1839, influenced people to move to the frontier land, which was

inexpensive. The expansion developed commerce. Private property represented political power and self-sufficiency.

Subsequently, an economist called Coxe⁴¹ made a place for the machine in the myth of the garden. He created the idea of industrialization as a way to realize the ideal of the middle landscape. He argued for a centralized government and saw machinery as a symbol of national power. In his opinion, the factory system would be redeemed in America by contact with nature.

Marx mentions Alexander Hamilton as a man who also believed in the society of maximum productivity. These ideas were brought from the German philosopher Friedrich Schiller. He believed the factory system turned men and women into parts of a mechanism. “The image of the machine brought loss of inner freedom even as it provided outward power” (MARX, 1964, p.173). For Carlyle’s the machine regulates thoughts and feelings. “Men are grown mechanical”. In this sense, feelings are neglected. He argued that the individual was controlled by social forces, and, in his opinion, the machine system was transforming the worker into a commodity. It also brought the wish to find harmony again between the material and the psychic.

According to Marx, the image of the machine’s sudden appearance is recurrent in American fiction writings. Wordsworth saw the machines as the “fever of the world”. Blake, in England, associated the factory system to ugliness. For Hawthorne, the machine invaded the peace of an enclosed space. He also believed that political and psychic dissonance was brought together with industrialism.

Nevertheless, in 1844, the machine had captured the public’s imagination. Dreams for peace, equality, and freedom were replaced by technology. In 1845, the first version of *The Manifest Destiny*⁴², stimulated the spread of population to the south and west of North –

⁴¹ Tench Coxe, an ambitious, young Philadelphia merchant unsatisfied with America after the end of the Revolutionary War evoked the American moral geography to acquire wealth. He spread the image of universe as a mechanism. Technology would help America to reach the pastoral idea (MARX, p. 151- 167).

⁴² *Manifest Destiny* is a phrase first used in 1844 by a New York journalist called John L. O’Sullivan in his magazine *The Democratic Review*. In his essay he called on the U.S annexation of Texas. He believed that the expansion of U. S. democratic style was inevitable. The citation received renewed attention by American politicians, but its ideology continued to have an influence on American political ideology in the twentieth century. It became a standard historical of the westward movement across North American towards the Pacific

America and the extermination of Indians. By 1848 the strongest opposition to industrial capitalism came from the socialist movement. In the U.S.A. however, this movement never got any strength. This was justified in many ways by the economic abundance of the country and the relief which came along with free land on the western frontier. The prejudice against Africans and other racial and ethnic minorities helped to establish and sustain the privileged status of Anglo-Saxon whites, and thus helped to impede the formation of shared working-class consciousness and a political movement. Above this, there was the credibility in prevailing attitudes, in American exceptionalism, in the belief in the chance to improve, in the national mission, which has its roots in Puritanism⁴³. The mission of expanding was spread among American pioneers. Thomas Jefferson believed other republics would be founded similarly to the U.S.A., extending the area of *freedom* which, for many, is considered the area of *slavery*.

Marx argues that the idea was “A machine invades the world ‘liberating oppressed people of the old world- salvation of mankind” (1964, p.206). This imperialist obsession incited the substitution of agriculture for industrial development. Once the conflict between the machine and the rural idea was neutralized, a national unity plus social equality would be established.

The author develops the idea that, by the end of the 19th century, people faced the end of the romanticized west. The unspoiled land became private land which received a huge number of immigrants. The frontier faced a paradox: it was a zone of contact and separation. Mechanization was again provoking disharmony. After earning money people should go West to settle down. By moving west, they hoped to find a new life different from urban, aristocratic Europe. Jeffersonian hope was embodying the pastoral dream in social institutions but “the golden age was consciousness not located in reality” (MARX, p.264).

According to Marx, Pastoralism was attractive to migratory Europeans because the redemptive possibilities in America were credible. In addition, the reconciliation between

Ocean. The historian William E. Weeks noted that three key themes were related to the *Manifest Destiny*. First, there is the virtue of the American people and their institution; then, there is the mission to spread these institutions, remaking the world in the image of the U.S.A.; and the destiny under God to accomplish this work (Marx, 1964, p. 207).

⁴³ America’s Puritan heritage developed the idea of American exceptionalism. It was present in John Winthrop’s sermon “City in a Hill” (1630), in Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* (1776), in president Abraham Lincoln’s description of the nation (MARX, 1964).

material progress and the ancient pastoral dream of regaining an ideal state of harmony with nature seemed to be possible insofar as wilderness could be transformed into gardens.

In *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (1957), Richard Chase states that “the best of American culture lies on contradictions, not on units. The attempt to resolve them creates melodramatic actions or pastoral idylls” (CHASE, 1983, p. 342). CHASE was not concerned about extra-literary causes such as the unbelievable fast industrialization of an undeveloped society. “A single generation faced the rustic and large landscape being transformed into the site of the world’s most productive industrial machine” (p.343). Chase developed the idea that, in American novels, he realized the writers’ concern was not about social verisimilitude, but about morality and metaphysics.

The reconciliation between the pastoral ideal and the advanced capitalist society is also present in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald tried to mediate the claims of a collective institutional life and the claims of the individual. The question was: “Where do you locate your green field?” (MARX, p. 285). According to Marx, Fitzgerald realized the impossible reconciliation between two modes of perception: one which is esthetically and emotionally satisfying; and the other which is analytically and practically effective. His character James Gatz tried to move from simplicity to sophistication, from the West to the East society. Gatz’s persistence, determination and individual courage are understood only in relation to his dream: the original European vision of the fresh, green breast of the new world. Nick is the one who decides upon the value of the dream. He must testify the validity of the garden imagery. He remembers Gatsby’s parties:

I spent my Saturday nights in New York because those gleaming, dazzling parties of his were with me so vividly that I could still hear the music and the laughter, faint and incessant, from his garden. (FITZGERALD, 1975, p. 187).

The narrator places Daisy in the industrial landscape of 20th century America. To this extent, he is able to discriminate between “the green light” and the industrial landscape of the 20s. In this sense, the Valley of Ashes is the result of this technological power which also makes possible Gatsby’s wealth, his material possibilities. The valley represents an effect of industrialization. It presents the impossibility of the American Dream being feasible. The novel alerts that behind the American mythical past, there is an ideology of power, class, race and gender prejudices.

Gatsby is a bootlegger and his gangster friends trust him. He cannot escape his present and the power of machines: “there was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler’s thumb” (Ibidem, p.45). The machines, like the car which killed Myrtle, are forces working against the dream of pastoral fulfillment. Gatsby believed he could change history, looking for a better place to live. He believed in the possibility of renewal, in the possibility of achieving his paradisiacal place, convincing others and himself of his privileged breeding. He stands, in this sense, for the multiple identities in America.

By combining Gatsby’s outlaw behavior with a faithful belief in the American Dream of success, Nick redeems Gatsby. He says about Gatsby:

The lawn and drive had been crowded with the faces of those who guessed at his corruption- and he had stood on those steps, concealing his incorruptible dream, as he waved them goodbye (Ibidem, p. 160).

Nevertheless, Gatsby needs to be eliminated in order to recover his place in a past pastoral idea. In the end, when Nick returns to Long Island for the last time, he explains Gatsby’s destiny associating it to the large fable of the American transcendental dream, providing identification with the hero and his pastoral illusions. “We drove over to Fifth Avenue, so warm and soft, almost pastoral, on the summer Sunday afternoon, that I wouldn’t have been surprised to see a great flock of white sheep turn the corner” (FITZGERALD, p. 34).

Back in Long Island, after Gatsby’s death and realizing the summer is over, Nick describes his vision: “[...] the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island that flowered once for Dutch sailor’s - a fresh, green breast of the new world” (Ibidem, p.187). Nick’s vision discloses the past by melting away the inessential present. According to Leo Marx, it reveals that Gatsby’s uncommon gift for hope had its origin in the moment when Europeans first came to America. The national character had incorporated this hope. Gatsby believed everything could be right again, if the temporary moment of intensity in which he kissed Daisy could last forever.

Nick realizes the ideal pastoral landscape has been destroyed by a counter-force. It is clear when he speaks in the last chapter about Gatsby: “He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of republic rolled on under the night” (Ibidem, p.188).

The hero ends up dead, almost alone, but the narrative reveals that he paid a tribute to a dream, he died for Americans. This national ideal is very strong in the novel: “Americans, while willing, even eager, to be serfs, have always been obstinate about being peasantry” (Ibidem, p. 95). And in another moment:

Or perhaps I had merely grown used to it, grown to accept West Egg as a world complete in itself, with its own standards and its own great figures, second to nothing because it had no consciousness of being so, [...] (p. 111).

The novel provides a severe criticism of the American Dream. According to Marius Bewley, in an article called “Scott Fitzgerald’s Criticism of America” (1954), the novel “embodies a criticism of American experience, not of manners, but of a basic historical attitude to life [...] the withering of the American Dream” (BEWLEY, 1963, p.126).

The American Dream is a romantic idea which encompasses the natural and spiritual; reality and illusion, whose boundaries are mobile. Leo Marx explained how it suffered historical changes. It was the Pilgrim’s dream of founding a new Golden Age based on religious freedom. Then, Benjamin Franklin added the idea of constant progress, egalitarian democracy for all citizens. After him, Thomas Jefferson believed in the creation of an agrarian nation in the U.S.A. Moving west was the symbol of democracy because the huge availability of land brought the promise of an egalitarian society. His geographic vision of the country was imaginary, but it made the future of the nation possible. In the end of the 19th century, the idea of American exceptionalism brought the need for conquering new territories abroad. In any case, the American Dream was then placed in material possibilities. After World War I, the gap between material possibilities and idealism was very strong. And this is the moment in which Scott Fitzgerald creates *The Great Gatsby*. In the novel, the Dream is also represented as a place:

One autumn night, five years before, they had been walking down the street when the leaves were falling, and they came to a place where there were no trees and the sidewalk was white with moonlight. They stopped here and turned to each other. Now it was a cold night with that mysterious excitement in it which comes at the two changes of the year. The quiet lights in the houses were humming out into the darkness and there was a stir and bustle among the stars. Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees—he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder (FITZGERALD, p.117).

According to Bewley, the Dream is a “product of the frontier and the West rather than of the Puritan tradition” (Ibidem, p.125). She adds: “The reality in such an attitude lies in its faith in life; the illusion lies in the indiscriminating multiplication of its material possibilities”(Ibidem, p. 126). The characters in the novel present how these illusions seem to be more real than reality. If reality is represented by intensity in life, it is embodied in Gatsby, but also in Myrtle’s intense vitality. While Gatsby represents spiritual intensity, Myrtle represents only physical, sensual intensity. Obviously, the text emphasizes the spiritual transcendence of the dream as something somehow forgotten that reappears cyclically. In Nick’s words: “- an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago [...]” (FITZGERALD, p.118).

According to Leo Marx, the middle class writers and intellectuals, having rarely, if ever, experienced serious material deprivation are likely to take for granted the satisfaction of basic needs, and may regard the renunciation of some material advantages. They are the comfortable, socially and geographically mobile segments of the middle class. They tend to identify their interests neither with the most powerful financial and corporate elite nor with the workers who sell their labor by the hour, day, or week. They have an awareness of the unfulfilled promise of social justice.

Fitzgerald, being one member of this group of writers, showed the appeal to pastoralism and the impossibility of its realization. Otherwise, his perception of American life in the twenties repudiates the dominant culture and its obsession with material progress and, simultaneously, he presents that this high class will survive. The best solution is running back to Middle- West, like Nick, to a place where family traditions are still strong:

That is my Middle West [...] I am part of that [...] a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family’s name. I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all- Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadaptable to Eastern life (p. 183).

The novel articulates an idea about history as a natural occurrence, as the result of destiny, not choice. Nick returns to Middle-West, which means a return to the past in order to dream ahead. This return is conceived as a moral imperative, not as a pragmatic necessity.

Idealizing America is a mode of looking back to a mystic pastoral moment that was never really placed in reality, but it maintains the American Dream alive, reproducing itself. In this sense, Fitzgerald’s narrative works to challenge the feasibility of the Dream and to

rescue it from the past. Through Gatsby, he testifies that there is no reconciliation between greed and the self-made men, between a U.S.A. society which is conceived as wealthy, but corrupted. The novel's magic and romance, in Gatsby's vision of an ideal love, conceals a negative face. But the West as America is only a fantasy of identity and Fitzgerald ironically presents, in the novel, that American identity is as a network of contradictions: disintegration and renewal, struggle and conformism.

5. Closing Remarks

The Great Gatsby can be classified as a western story which expresses frustrated expectations in relation to women, social class, race and ethnicity. It reinforces pastoral, patriarchal and nationalistic values.

In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I studied how the issue of social class mobility and the sense of belonging to a class or a place disguise female restrictions and racial prejudice in the novel. Its apparent neutrality represents a point of view, a moral perspective of the twenties, which extends to our contemporary reflections on exclusion, discrimination. The novel articulates images and actions in a coherent plot, mimetically reproducing external motifs and conflicts, subjected to the judgment of only one character: Nick. The novel's esthetical closure provides an organization of space-plot-history, like an allegorical image, a conception developed in the third chapter. Fitzgerald's novel presents his brilliance to convey social relations by their suggestive concretion into images. It is a process of vision, a moralistic allegorical construction.

Nick tells Gatsby: " 'Your place looks like the World's Fair'" (FITZGERALD, 1975, p. 88). Then, in his retrospective narrative, Nick provides a portrayal of Gatsby's idealized world. And he explains: "For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his [Gatsby's] imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy's wing" (FITZGERALD, p.106). Gradually, Nick accepts the West as a 'world complete in itself, with its own standards and its own great figures, second to nothing because it had no consciousness of being so" (p. 111). And, later on, he suggests to Gatsby's father: " ' _ I though you might want to take the body [Gatsby's] West." And shaking his head, the father replies: 'Jimmy always like it better down East". (p. 175) He concludes that if his son had lived: "If he'd of lived, he'd of been a great man. A man like James J. Hill. He'd of helped build up the country"(p.175). And Nick finally argues: "After Gatsby's death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes' power of correction"' (p. 183). The East is constructed as an unreal fairy world, an illusion which vanishes till the end of the novel. What remains is a proud, upper-valorization of the West, of America: "I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all, -Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerns [...]" (p. 183). Jordan, Daisy and Tom end up included in the meaning of the West, but there is still the exclusion of Myrtle and George.

Suggestively, the poor are excluded from mainstream society and also from the idealistic imagery involving the American Dream of success.

The novel has traditionally been seen as an expression of the disillusionment in relation to the American Dream. By observing it as an allegory, we conclude that it also reinforces the Dream among the middle class and high society. The novel presents a double standard, which, simultaneously desires and repudiates it. In the case of Daisy and Gatsby, while one stands for the American territory, the other stands for the American Dream, but this correspondence is unstable. It is also the result of the impossibility of reconciliation among the pastoral ideal and the demands of a Modern capitalist society.

Though presenting its unreality, we, readers are invited to believe in the Dream. We even learn to associate it to our own personal dreams: “the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter- tomorrow we will run faster, [...]” (p. 188). In this sense, *we* stand for *America*, but only if *we* are self-made *men* or members of an ethnic group whose roots belong to a traditional American family.

In the allegorical creation of the novel, time and space are linked by a fluid image of the eternal return to West, as an obsession with heritage (Nationalism) and a need of attachment of some sort.

Nick chooses to take refuge in the national mythological history, in a place where the American Dream remains alive and possible. The novel presents an idealized notion of an Era in which places are inhabited by homogeneous idealized communities. Current fragmentation and disruption were ignored, or punished, or adapted to the demands of a moralistic society. In the end of the narrative, when Nick returns to Gatsby’s house, he refuses to listen to the taxi-driver’s story and he erases an obscene word said by a boy. He also feels uncomfortable and avoids speaking to Tom and Daisy. He does not want to see Jordan’s face again. In this sense, he does not make any effort to understand them. Instead, he considers them as victims of Eastern society, the real villain which stands for capitalism. By diminishing, he subjugates them:

One afternoon late in October I saw Tom Buchanan... ‘Tom,’ I inquired, ‘what did you say to Wilson that afternoon?’

He stared at me without a word, and I knew I had guessed right about those missing hours. I started to turn away, but he took a step after me and grabbed my arm.

‘I told him the truth,’ he said...I told him who owned the car that ran over his wife...’

I couldn't forgive him or like him, but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified... It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people... I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child... Then he [Tom] went into the jewelry store.. rid of my provincial squeamishness for ever" (Ibidem, p.185).

In the same way, Nick left Jordan behind: “ ‘I'm thirty,’ I said. ‘I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor.’ She didn't answer. Angry, and half in love with her, and tremendously sorry, I turned away’ ” (p. 185). He represents these who set out to discover and change the world. And what he faced were not Indians, but higher-class urban men and women, fighting to be on the top of a capitalist society. The voices of others will not be listened to in his narrative.

Nick's return to Middle-West as a moral surrender is an attempt to retreat into security, a refusal to confront the ambiguities of maturity, the impact of a world in which women try to behave like men, crossing boundaries, and the rich manage to maintain their *status* avoiding “heroes” like Gatsby.

Gatsby was actually a kind of migrant trying to buy his green card to America. He was not “in charge” of the process, and that is why, according to Nick, he could only suffer the “inevitable” consequences of historical demands. Nick questions this society of consumption which determines Gatsby's fall, but he does nothing to change it, he just runs away.

The romantic image of the first settlers conquering the new world, the lost paradise, the virgin pastoral landscape reinforces the illusion of an experience which was created in language and thus can not be placed in reality. Nick tells Gatsby that “one cannot repeat the past” (p.117). Yet it is exactly what he does, because romanticizing a provincial West is a way of escapism. As the West stands for the nation, “a world complete in itself” (FITZGERALD, 1975, p.111), its borders seem to need preservation and reinforcement.

The Great Gatsby materializes a need for wonder, and for renewal that the outside world is unable to provide. Readjusting the mythological past represents also a wish to redeem the present. In this sense “retrospection is also projection” (HANDLEY, 2002, p. 183), a conception developed by Walter Benjamin, who brought the category of time to the study of allegory, considering as dialectic, in which past, present and future conquer for a “place of meaning”.

The suggestion that the promised land and its democratic life possibilities transcends through a dialectical movement back and forth, future and past is evident in the novel. And the novel's construction of gender relations and class struggles appear natural and a-historical. Men and women are linked through marriage relationships, which are conceived as social contracts.

In Fitzgerald's fiction, these representations demand further attention, because they are related to a project of rebuilding a national identity. Instead, what appears is a struggle for white Anglo-Saxon's reminiscence at the top of society following the American ideology of success. The novel suggests that the Dream is for everyone, but its realization is only for selected ones, the ones whose breeding deserves honor to a past Puritan tradition. The hero is the one who accepts to die for others, and to the extent that the novel represents inequalities, it also reinforces them. It shows who goes to war and who stays. It shows who has the power in society and what this category can do in order to maintain it.

The novel is extremely nationalist while it provides our identification with a hero that dies for the American Dream. The hero stands, at the same time, in favor and against a reality of capitalist demands that escape his control. He follows his father - the capitalist society of consumption - to become a self-made man, "the son of God". But his "father" lets him die, as in the biblical story of Jesus. Besides being the "son" of these capitalist demands, he was entrapped by them. While he is defeated, his mythical image and influence increases. According to Nick's suggestive narration, Gatsby dies for a dream that has no practical link to historical reality. Even so, Fitzgerald makes it clear: the Dream is worthwhile. The message is that dying for it is worthwhile for *heroes*. As desire depends on impediment, this apparent contradiction is placed in a dimension of fantasy and prohibition and it can be understood with the allegorical mode. The United States is characterized, in the novel, as a figure, a trope, the West. One single vision creates a false idea of consensus about the country's historical past and its greatness is re-inscribed in the reader's imaginary through the novel, specially due to the hero's tragic ending. It moves the reader with a feeling of commitment to the idea Gatsby died for. It also creates the commitment to revive the American Dream in each one's consciousness. And it is here that lies Fitzgerald's brilliance. He does not avoid contradictions, he links future to past, reality to fantasy, actual subjects to imaginary dead characters, the first settlers of America to immigrants. The West as America is a "form of narcissism, that the audience already wants in advance" (HANDLEY, 2002, p.184).

In a parallel level of meaning, the hero dies because of a woman who is conceived as inconstant and who does not fulfill his expectations. She is blamed for his failure as historically women are blamed for men's frustrations, for domestic instability and moral disorder. He dies reinforcing the American struggle for territory as a matter of courage and faith in an ancient prophetic promise: the American's divine right to expand their way of living as a timeless straightforward ideal. This narrative reinforces the Modern discourse of cultural hegemony, in which the sacrificial hero dies for a woman, metonymically representing the American Dream and the American nation- objects of the male dream of conquest and success, a concept developed by Fetterley in her book. Women stand for an ideal place in the American Dream - whose original ideology was described as democratic and politically egalitarian- and finally, for its corruption.

Myrtle Wilson's 'broken nose and her torn breast' along the side of the road contrasts with the "fresh green breast of the new world" that the Dutch mercantilists saw before the founding of the American nation. This metonymic image of the female body presents a suggestive revision of the direction the Dream took. Poor women are smashed, while the rich are idealized. In the same sense, women are classified according to two categories: as ideal images of beauty or images of vulgarity. The ones who serve as idealized images of male struggle are demoralized, but they will survive because they are considered as corrupt as society. Sensuous poor women are punished right away. In the novel, violence is not described as upsetting but a necessary constitutional element of the narrative. It organizes the narrative coherence.

It is the repetition of the pattern which links the feminine to space, the land that will be conquered by the masculine figure. Gatsby dies to become a huge collective male myth, to legitimate people's struggle for nationality, and to show some hints about the new directions the American Dream was taking in the 1920s.

The hero's amorality finds redemption, while the Easterners are morally degraded. Even so, the last are the ones who will survive. This West-East polarity clearly presents a class struggle. West's similarity to East stands for a bourgeois middle-class's similarity of interests to a higher class and it stands also for America's similarity to Europe. While the North and South as geographical polarities are ignored in the narrative, distinctions among blacks and whites are implicitly expressed as negative consequences, as the fear of an exotic *other* competing in American society. But America's exceptionalism is what survives in the creation of Gatsby.

According to William Handley, the novel projects an intrinsic ambiguity. The tragedy seems to be nobody's fault, just destiny. And at the same time, Fitzgerald impels us to doubt accidents. "Accidents are the repetition of a pattern, an atemporal category. He reinforces a sense of inevitability" (HANDLEY,2002. p.178).

Nick acknowledges that we must look to the outside world, if not for fulfillment, at least for correlatives of our internal needs. And the novel teaches us what these needs should be: the wish for getting money, spiritual ideological fulfillment and the longing for a place to sustain an inherited identity.

The novel's final ambiguity about the validity of the American Dream impels us – readers – to question the validity of our own dreams and the relevance of these categories: gender, race, ethnicity and class in the creation of an identity based on a binary opposition, the "I" and the "Other". What kind of success is possible for us to dream of? For which of us?

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APPENDIX: A Bio-bibliography of Francis Scott Fitzgerald

The first major study of Fitzgerald's literary work was Arthur Mizener's book *The Far Side of Paradise*⁴⁴. He used a biographical approach to provide psychological explanations about Fitzgerald's personality and intellect, arguing that his art was great because he was a "great man". In the forties, Fitzgerald's reputation was not high, therefore Mizener's criticism rescued him creating a heroic atmosphere around him.

The way his life and his work taken together represent what, in the very depths of our natures, we are- we Americans, anyhow, and- with some variations-perhaps most men of the western world (MIZENER, 1955, p.157).

According to Mizener, Scott Fitzgerald was born in a fairly well-to-do family in St Paul, Minnesota, on September 24, in 1896. His mother was a wealthy Irish immigrant's descendent. His father was a salesman in New York. They lived comfortably because of the inheritance of Scott's mother. He was a Catholic and studied at Princeton University where he mingled with the high-classes from the Eastern Seaboard who obsessed him for the rest of his life.

In 1917, he dropped out of the university to join the army, but the war ended just before he was to be sent overseas. After his discharge in 1919, he went to New York to seek his fortune in order to marry Zelda Sayre, the daughter of a High Court judge from the South. Unwilling to wait while Fitzgerald succeeded in the advertisement business, Zelda broke their engagement. Meanwhile, he spent much of his time writing and re-writing his first novel *This Side of Paradise*, which, on its publication in 1920, became an instant success. In the same year, Zelda Sayre reconsidered and they got married. In 1921, their child Frances (known as Scottie) was born. After several years of high living- all night parties and trips to Europe- financed by Scott's success as a writer, Zelda became increasingly troubled by mental illness. Being diagnosed a schizophrenic, she spent the rest years of her life as a resident of sanitariums. There, she wrote an autobiographical novel called *Save Me the Waltz*. Scott discouraged her to publish it because it anticipated the same plot-material he was planning to use in his fourth novel *Tender is the Night*.

⁴⁴ Arthur Mizener was a professor at Cornell during the forties and fifties. He wrote: *The Far Side of Paradise: A Biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Vintage Books. 1959.

In 1929, America's economy collapsed. It was the beginning of the Great Depression. This happened at a time when Fitzgerald himself began to have serious mental and physical health problems. In 1937, he went to Hollywood alone to become a screenwriter. There he died in 1941 of a heart attack. Only after his death and the publication of the *Crack-Up*⁴⁵ in 1945, did critics begin to focus seriously on his work. During his professional career, a period of about twenty years, he produced around one hundred and sixty short stories, mostly for the high-price magazines.

Mizener created Fitzgerald's image as a tragic literary figure and a national representative. He pointed out that his novels portray the shining world of the rich with a critical exposure of the corrupting influence of money.

On the other hand, critics such as F. R. Leavis⁴⁶ emphasized Fitzgerald's "inability to produce great art" due to the fact that he could not distinguish his fiction writing from his external life experiences. This was considered a proof of his lack of intellectual control over his writings.

During his lifetime, only a few critics took his work seriously. His personal friends and critics, Edmund Wilson⁴⁷ and John Peale Bishop pointed out Fitzgerald's painful journey toward maturity. Even Ernest Hemingway helped to popularize the notion of Fitzgerald's talent as a "fortuitous gift" for which the author faced an agonizing struggle to develop and control. "Unfortunately, he died believing himself a failure", argues Wilson. It was only during the sixties that he achieved a secure place among American writers. And *The Great Gatsby* became a classical American novel.

According to Sergio Perosa (1965), this novel presents a balance between the view of an intimate observer and that of the detached outsider. Fitzgerald occupies a dual position, being a romantic in the way he wished to plunge into life, and a moralist who wanted to remain detached and to analyze life. That is why the novel is crammed with romance. "On

⁴⁵ This is book collection of essays in which Fitzgerald examined his life in crisis gathered together by Edmund Wilson and published with Fitzgerald's notebooks and some letters.

⁴⁶ References of Fitzgerald are found in LEAVIS, F. R. Introduction to Marius Bewley, *The Complex Fate* (London: Chatto and Windus. 1968, pp. x-xi).

⁴⁷ Edmund Wilson was an American critic. He wrote *Patriotic Gore* and many other influential books. In relation to Fitzgerald, the most important is *Fitzgerald Before The Great Gatsby*, reprinted in Kazin ed., F.S.F., 84p.

the one hand, Fitzgerald tried to pass a moral judgment on his characters, but on the other he sympathized with his characters and shared some of their illusions”⁴⁸ (PEROSA, 1965).

John B. Chambers⁴⁹ claims that critics have been so firmly convinced for forty years of Fitzgerald’s emotional involvement with the work, that they failed to recognize a controlled ironical presentation. According to Chambers, the omniscient author technique used in the two first novels has obscured the ironical point of view. The change to a first-person narrative in *The Great Gatsby* provided a form for the expression of Fitzgerald’s ironical- tragic philosophy and his code of morality linked to a representation of a national experience. “The ironical-tragic philosophy supplies a meaning which functions on the level of a historical national truth” (CHAMBERS, p.101).

By following his novels, we see his development as a fiction writer. His major novels are *This Side of Paradise* (1920), *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender is the Night* (1934). He left *The Last Tycoon* (1940) unfinished. The first novel was considered a nostalgic look at college life without intellectual and artistic coherence by critics such as James Miller. The second was an attempt to use the principles of the ironical-pessimistic school of fiction, whose roots are in Nathaniel Hawthorne. The third is *The Great Gatsby*. It was considered by Fitzgerald his masterpiece- “the inevitable defeat of the brave innocents”. The next was not well received in America and Scott turned to script-writing in Hollywood for the final three years of his life. *Babylon Revisited* (1931) is one of his best late short stories. It describes the Lost Generation after its moral and economic collapse. It was at this time that he wrote the autobiographical essays collected posthumously in *The Crack-up* and his unfinished novel, *The Last Tycoon*- a picture of Hollywood- expressing a sense of queerness of commonplace, a “reiteration of a fluid society’s a-historical blindness” (MIZENER, p.166).

He wrote about the glamour and moral ugliness of the twenties, which represented a time of great changes in American society. The advanced capitalist culture promoted a new culture of glamour, which was supposed to conceal the gap between economic and spiritual fulfillment. According to Fitzgerald, a “vast, vulgar and meretricious beauty” grew up in the

⁴⁸ See PEROSA, Sergio. *The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965. He was a professor of the mentioned university.

⁴⁹ Chambers is an Academic Dean at the Tennessee Wesleyan college in Tennessee, U.S.A. See CHAMBERS, John B. *The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. London: Macmillan. 1989, 212p.

national imagery. Most writers of the period thought it was possible to tell the “truth” about the inner experience of Americans.

ANNEX - A National Allegory



American Progress was painted in 1872 by John Gast. This is an [allegorical](#) representation of Manifest Destiny. In the scene, an angelic woman (sometimes identified as [Columbia](#), a 19th century personification of the United States) carries the light of "civilization" westward with American settlers, stringing [telegraph](#) wire and laying train track as she travels. [American Indians](#) and wild animals flee—or lead the way—into the darkness of the "uncivilized" West.

Available at http://www.cpr.org/Museum/Ephemera/American_Progress.html
Accessed on 02 jul. 2006.