



Universidad  
de Huelva

**Juan Carlos Ruano Lora**

“The Happy Twenties: Characterological Analysis, Symbolism and Principal Themes  
in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925)”

“Los felices años veinte: análisis caracterológico, simbolismo y temas principales en *El  
Gran Gatsby* de Fitzgerald (1925)”

Tutor: Dr. Jefferey Morse Simons Wilson

Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Facultad Humanidades

Grado en Estudios Ingleses

Convocatoria de septiembre, 2017

## INDEX

<b>Summary/Resumen</b> .....	0
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>2. Objectives</b> .....	2
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	2
<b>4. Conceptual Framework</b> .....	3-4
<b>5. Characterological Analysis</b> .....	4
5.1. Nick Carraway.....	4-6
5.2. Analysis of the Rest of the Important Characters.....	6
5.2.1. Jay Gatsby.....	7-8
5.2.2. Tom Buchanan.....	8
5.2.3. Daisy.....	8-9
5.2.4. Jordan Baker.....	9-10
<b>5.3. Symbolism</b> .....	10
5.3.1 The Green Light.....	10
5.3.2 The Valley of Ashes.....	11
5.3.3 The Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg.....	12-13
5.3.4 Jay Gatsby – His Mansion and Parties.....	13
<b>5.4. Main Themes</b>	
5.4.1. Love and Relationships.....	13-14
5.4.2. The American Dream and its Decay.....	14
5.4.3. Materialism – Pomp and Wealth.....	15-16
<b>6. The Society of the Twenties (The Roaring Twenties)</b> .....	16-18
<b>7. Conclusions</b> .....	18-19
<b>8. Bibliography</b> .....	19-20

## **Summary**

The adoption of the following title chosen for the elaboration of this Final Degree Essay, "The Happy Twenties: Characterological Analysis, Symbolism and Principal Themes in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925)", owes to literary criteria related to the novel. The sections that are found within the title, refer to different key aspects in the configuration of its story. After reading the novel of F. Scott Fitzgerald and its subsequent analysis, there are remarkable aspects in its characters, symbols and themes and, mainly, these constitute the composition of the title of this essay. Thus, the research carried out in this essay focuses on the study of five contents that are distributed as follows and, in order of appearance: the analysis of the narrator of the novel, Nick Carraway; the individualized analysis of the rest of the important characters, such as Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, Daisy and Jordan Baker; the different forms in which the symbolism appears in the work; the main themes that are developed in the plot; and the depiction that Fitzgerald makes of this golden American era, the so-called "Happy Twenties."

**Keywords:** Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, The Happy Twenties, Characters, Symbolism, Themes.

## **Resumen**

La adopción del título escogido para la elaboración de este Trabajo de Fin de Grado, “Los felices años veinte: análisis caracterológico, simbolismo y temas principales en *El Gran Gatsby* de Fitzgerald (1925)”, obedece a criterios literarios relacionados con la novela. Los apartados que encontramos dentro del título hacen referencia a diferentes aspectos clave en la configuración de su historia. Tras la lectura de la novela de F. Scott Fitzgerald y su posterior análisis, aparecen aspectos reseñables en diferentes ámbitos dentro de la trama y, principalmente, éstos forman parte de la composición del título de este ensayo. De tal forma, el trabajo de investigación que se realiza en este trabajo centra su atención en el estudio de cinco contenidos que se reparten de la siguiente manera y, por orden de aparición : el análisis del narrador de la novela, Nick Carraway; el análisis individualizado del resto de personajes importantes, como Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan, Daisy y Jordan Baker; las diferentes formas en las que el simbolismo está presente en la obra; los temas principales que se desarrollan en la obra y la representación que Fitzgerald hace de esta época dorada americana, los denominados “Los felices años veinte”.

**Palabras clave :** Fitzgerald, *El Gran Gatsby*, Los Felices Años Veinte, Personajes, Simbolismo, Temas.

## **1. Introduction**

In the elaboration of this Final Degree Essay, we will study and analyze from several points of view the novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925), written by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and set in a fictional Long Island, New York, after the end of World War One. In large measure, we will focus on a characterological analysis of the main characters of this work, and through this study, we will discover how the different participants in the novel give a coherent meaning to the stories that surround them, to the time in which they live, to the events that occur and, above all, to the main plot of which they are part. The different sections that will be involved in the elaboration of this Final Degree Essay will be discussed from a historical point of view, since the time in which this work is set the “Roaring Twenties” governs the approach of the novel. All this will be developed below in the objectives section.

*The Great Gatsby* is a key work in the history of American literature at the beginning of the last century, and it shows a reality that was very significant to the later development of America. It is worth investigating, given its literary import during the period after the end of World War One. The novel also reflects significant changes that affected American society at the time. Investigations like this one are important, since despite being fictional, the novel is a work full of content that brings different points of view of the period, the early twenties in the United States. The themes in this work, the representation and nature of its key characters, and the symbolism with which it is impregnated invite a Final Degree Essay such as this one.

My study draws on previous ones in that it focuses on several important parts of the novel at the same time, with the society of the moment as a frame of reference. We thus focus on not only particular aspects of the work, but we also interweave the key aspects of the work, such as the main characters, the symbolism and the recurring themes. The main reasons that motivated my choice of this area of study are my interest in American literature, as well as my conviction that this novel represents a very significant period in the history of the United States, the so-called “Happy Twenties”.

## **2. Objectives**

The thesis that we will defend throughout this Final Degree Essay is the importance of the typology and behavior of the main characters embodied in the novel *The Great Gatsby*. These characters give a coherent sense of the fictional universe created by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The features and values that the characters represent, are highly indicative of the social classes that they come from, and they are the cause of the different outcomes that take place in the novel. All this occurs under the watchful eye of the narrator, Nick Carraway.

Subsequently, we will establish ties of union between the characters and other aspects of interest that appear in the work and that are part of our analysis. In order to be able to defend our thesis, we will develop the following sections: an analysis of the character Nick Carraway, the analysis of the rest of the characters, the symbolism in the novel, its recurring themes and the connection of the content of the novel, *The Great Gatsby*, to the society of the moment, called the Happy Twenties.

## **3. Methodology**

In this section, we summarize the different strategies and methods used to reach, as well as to develop, the objectives proposed in our work, and which we explained in the previous section.

On the one hand, the set of strategies that will be implemented are based mainly on an in-depth and individualized study of each of the sections that we have marked as keys to defend and argue our main thesis. Our main purpose, then, is to develop a study according to the order and relevance of each of its proposed objectives.

On the other hand, the process of compiling the different data and evidence, which we will use for the writing of the various sections in our analysis, makes use of several secondary sources, such as literary articles, critical and analytical works, electronic resources, and especially the primary source, the novel itself, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

#### **4. Conceptual framework**

Through the adoption of a conceptual framework, we theorize the issues that are covered in this Final Degree Essay. These issues allow us to differentiate the stages of development of our work. At the same time, the conceptual framework serves as a guide and focuses our attention on the established objectives.

First of all, our study of the novel *The Great Gatsby* will lead us to an analysis that begins with a rather broad point of view, namely the perception of Nick Carraway as the narrator of the novel. Carraway gives us a global vision of what that happens. The analysis of this character as a homodiegetic narrator will facilitate a greater understanding of the plot developed in the work, and of the fictional reality established by the author. Carraway is the only impartial character that we find in the work, and as narrator we have a record of his thoughts, in addition to the perception he has of everything he experiences. For the development of this first point, we will make use of other works and previous investigations, in order to explain faithfully the figure of Nick and its importance in the novel.

Secondly, we will proceed to study the rest of key characters, from Jay Gatsby, Tom Buchanan and Daisy, to other prominent characters like Jordan Baker, and those who play a supporting secondary role, like George Wilson and Myrtle, Henry Gatz, Wolfsheim and Dan Cody. Once we have completed the analysis of these components of the novel with a more or less relevant importance among each of them, we will move to another important aspect in the novel that generates many interpretations, symbolism. Symbolism is a plausible feature in this novel, and the author is responsible for representing it in multiple ways. The significant manifestations of symbolism will be treated appropriately, taking as references previous studies and examples present in each of the chapters of the work. In the same way, we will make reference to the main recurring themes that appear in the course of the plot, and we will record how all these aspects are materialized through the action and interaction of the characters, as well as through the social reality that is established with them. Finally, once we have developed

the steps mentioned above, we will make a connection between *The Great Gatsby* and the American society of the time, which acts as a temporal and cultural frame of this work. The so-called “Happy Twenties” were a time of great importance for the history of America, and in our essay we will make a comparison of how the values and events of the moment affect and appear reflected in the course of the novel.

## **5. Charactereological Analysis**

Before starting with the analysis of Nick Carraway, we establish a small link between some of the values that this character represents in the novel and some of the values present in the society where the action is framed. As Carraway says at the beginning of the novel, while he was at the apartment which Tom used to meet his lover: “I was within and without, simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life” (37). That sentence tells us that on many occasions Nick is a passive subject and he evades what happens in the plot, although as the story continues, he feels more involved, especially with Gatsby. Nick is constantly trying to get away from acts that are not correct in his way of thinking, somehow going against the social mainstream of the twenties. For this reason, Carraway remarks several times in the novel his great honesty, as he himself does at the end of chapter three, where he says, “I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known”(59).

### **5.1. Nick Carraway**

Carraway occupies a unique place within *The Great Gatsby*, since he is at the same time the narrator and a participant in the story. He comes from a not-so-rich, middle-western family, and before fighting in World War One, Nick went to college. On his return from the War, he decided to leave for New York to work in the bond sales business, and from this point on, he narrates his experiences during the summer of 1922, between East Egg and West Egg, fictive towns on Long Island, from the perspective of a homodiegetic narrator.

We understand a homodiegetic narrator to be a character who is within the same story that is related, as is the case of Nick. This sort of narrator explicitly speaks in the first-person singular. In addition, this type of narrator usually acts from a subjective and partial point of view within the plot, as we see several times in the novel, especially when Nick is in scenes surrounded by several characters. As is the case of this novel, Carraway appears as a secondary protagonist, and in turn as the narrator of the story as at the beginning of the novel. We can see his strong emotional response to the story he tells, at the very beginning of the novel, when he says that “only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction. Gatsby, who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn (8)”. That phrase, “unaffected scorn”, is striking, and it shows somehow the mixture of feelings that Nick experiences during the novel. Likewise, we also see Carraway’s strong response at the end of the novel, after the devastating panorama present after Gatsby’s death. Carraway changes the impressions of the place he chose to spend the summer, when he says that “after Gatsby’s death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes’ power of correction” (167). Through these words, “the East was haunted for me”, we can observe how Nick feels that this place has lost its essence, and that it has succumbed to the immoral character of the time.

In other words, if we focus on certain aspects that have to do with Carraway as narrator, we agree with Mangum, who states that, “through Nick Carraway’s apparent simplicity in his first-person narration, he allows the reader, on the one hand, to see how the narrative is taking shape, and on the other hand, to participate in that narrative. Sensations that make both, Nick and the reader, remain inseparable from the beginning” (quoted in Matterson 40). In *The Great Gatsby*, Carraway is both narrator and focalizer. His focalization, as Genette argues, “is represented from two positions: that of the narrating present, what Nick feels and knows when writing; that of the narrated past, what Nick felt and saw at the time of the events described” (quoted in Messent 20).

During the novel, Nick makes use of the first-person singular to show all his experience. Similarly, during much of the plot Carraway narrates the events in such a way that he contemplates the action but does not take part in it, with the exception of the romance with Jordan Baker. Another important aspect to underline is the

transformation that Nick Carraway undergoes in terms of his personality and attitude to what surrounds him. At first, he is focused on his professional work and is confident that it will be a profitable summer. Early in the novel, for example, he speaks of the many readings he has to do: “there was so much to read, I bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities and I had the high intention of reading many other books besides” (10). As we can realize, Nick was focused on being successful in terms of work during that summer, but soon things changed. If we continue reading the story, at a certain point Nick tells us about an invitation he received at home, and it was from Jay Gatsby: “I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his ‘little party that night’ (43). Due to the attendance of Nick Gatsby’s party, the narrator is immersed in a new world thanks to the protagonist, Jay Gatsby, who causes a radical turn in the story. Through the novel, we observe how Nick faces several changes, and he passes from an innocent and busy man in his work, to a carousel of emotions with a tragic end that was not what was expected. Carraway is the only character who experiences a change in his personality from the beginning to the end of the story.

Finally, the most difficult situation that Nick has to face is the death of Jay Gatsby, the protagonist and the character to which Carraway is most related. In spite of being contrasting characters as Hanzo, for example, says: “Gatsby is rich, solitary, mysterious, obsessed and not bound by certain limits; Carraway is relatively poor, makes friends easily, is guarded in action and judgement” (quoted in Matterson 31). Shortly after Carraway and Gatsby said goodbye, Gatsby decided to take a bath in the pool while he was waiting for a call from Daisy. At the same time, George Wilson was going to the mansion of Gatsby to murder him, and shortly after a servant heard some shots: “it was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson’s body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete” (154). This last sentence, “and the holocaust was complete”, summarizes what Nick believes has put an end to Jay Gatsby and George Wilson, and to all the craziness that began at the

hotel when Tom and he argued. All this was aggravated by the accidental hit-and-run of Myrtle Wilson.

## **5.2. Analysis of the Rest of the Important Characters**

Before the analysis of these characters, we can establish an equivalence of the main features of these with some of the characteristics or symbols that were recurrent during the “Happy Twenties”. Gatsby represents the new rich people of that time, those whose gains came at the beginning of this golden age of American history. As we know at the end of the novel, much of Gatsby’s fortune was achieved thanks to alcohol smuggling. On the other hand, Tom Buchanan represents the faithful image of the old rich, as his attitude during the plot, as well as the way in which his character unfolds, so demonstrate. It could be said that Tom and Daisy represent the legal wealth during that time, those who wasted their money without any fear of the consequence. Daisy represents one of the appearances of women. Despite being immensely rich, she remained in a secondary role. She had no real authority in their marriage. For her part, Jordan Baker depicts faithfully the image of what was known as “flappers”: Women who wore bold clothes, a characteristic haircut and, above all, they performed actions that were attributed to men, like smoking, driving or drinking alcohol.

### **5.2.1. Jay Gatsby**

Gatsby is the main character of this novel, and he represents the image of several themes that are treated throughout *The Great Gatsby*, such as: wealth, idealism, love and the corruption of the American dream. The personal identity he represents throughout the plot is an invention, for his real name is James Gatz, and he comes from a poor family of midwestern farmers. He refused to accept his condition as poor, so he decided to change his own life. Dan Cody, a millionaire who takes him to sail around the world, instructed him as a person and later Gatsby was focused on establishing an empire, which took the smuggling of alcohol as the main source of income during Prohibition. Jay Gatsby represents one of the characters that does not develop in the novel, and his clear obsession with finding his own American dream leads him to opulence and to the desire to get the woman he seeks, Daisy Buchanan, a former love,

with plans that do not have an expected ending. Nick Carraway, his neighbor, will become to Gatsby a trustful person throughout the plot. The first time Nick and Jay meet each other, at Gatsby's party, Nick describes him in a very particular way: "He smiled understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself" (49).

### 5.2.2. Tom Buchanan

Tom, the man who Daisy married while Gatsby went to the War, was a rich man of inherited wealth. He and Daisy lived in East Egg, and Tom knew Nick because they went to the same school, where Tom was a football player. Early in the novel, we can see Nick's thoughts about Tom the first time they encounter each other at Tom's house in East Egg. Nick thinks that "Tom was one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterwards savors of anti-climax"(11). In light of that quote, we can realize somehow Nick's prejudices about his family. Tom's social class, who the enormously rich, leads him to maintain a series of affairs, despite being married to Daisy. The main affair in this novel is with Myrtle Wilson, sometimes Nick witnessed events of this affair in the first person. Tom Buchanan is depicted as an aggressive and cruel character in the novel and that behavior leads him to coerce and argue with other characters like Daisy, Gatsby and Myrtle.

### 5.2.3. Daisy

Daisy is Tom's wife and second the cousin of the narrator of this story, Nick Carraway. Daisy, has an affair with Gatsby who loves her passionately and makes her his object of personal desire. If we focus on the essence of Daisy, as the values she represents in the novel, we can realize that she shares some similarities with the so-called "flappers", but she seems to show an evolution in the opposite direction. We agree with Eliot, who argues that: "Daisy represents a certain evolution of the flappers.

These girls have grown to become empty, boring and sophisticated women" (quoted in Matterson 45). This represents one of the aspects of how women were depicted at the time. Instead, Daisy seems to reject some of these values, and she is depicted more as a sophisticated and boring woman in some aspects, possibly because of her marriage. The opposite face to that depiction is Jordan Baker, since she faithfully represents what a flapper is.

In spite of everything, Daisy has other charms, as we can see in a group of characters surrounding her, as Way states: "Daisy has the power to enchant the other characters" (quoted in Matterson 45). Although Nick does not trust her fully, most of the time Daisy makes other characters do what she wants. Later, with an overview of the plot in the story, once the narrator realizes the whole background among the different characters, Miller argues that "Daisy is the weakness of Gatsby's dream, as well as the cause of its destruction" (quoted in Matterson 46). After Gatsby's death and other crisis situations, the reader realizes how the real personality of Daisy works. Matterson states that: "at the moment of crisis she rejects Gatsby and retreats with Tom into the safety of their money" (46). Furthermore, Daisy runs away from East Egg, and she refuses any contact with Nick at the end of the novel.

#### 5.2.4. Jordan Baker

Jordan is a young woman who plays golf professionally and who meets Nick the first time he visits Daisy's house and Jordan and Nick have a romance during the summer that covers the plot of the story, Jordan also plays a crucial role with Nick when they devise a plan for Gatsby and Daisy to see each other after a long time. Jordan represents faithfully the image of flappers, for these women of the twenties wore short clothes, listened to jazz and danced the Charleston, among other things. They show risky manners for what was considered proper during that time, and they also were well-known for wearing excessive makeup, drinking too much alcohol and smoking, and above all for breaking social and sexual standards. In other words, the way in which Jordan is depicted through the novel can be summarized in a few words, as Way states

“in character terms, critics often relate Jordan to Daisy, in that both are seen as “careless” and “dishonest”. Other terms that are usually applied to her ‘cynicism’ and ‘irresponsibility’ (quoted in Matterson 47).

Finally, when Nick decides to end his relationship with Jordan, she tells him that she has met another man. Nick is disgusted and sorry, and he hangs up the phone to let her go forever. Nick expresses himself, thinking about all that he has experienced and says: “I’m thirty. I’m five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor. He didn’t answer. Angry and half in love with her and sorry, I turned away” (168-169).

### **5.3. Symbolism**

Fitzgerald, through the use of a series of symbols that appear recurrently in the novel, tries to capture the attention of the reader, showing that these symbolic representations are loaded with meaning, and that they involve important claims that affect directly the plot, in one form or another. The main symbols that are presented in the novel are: the Green light, the valley of ashes, the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg and an unbridled society that only centered its attention on having fun. Thus, the character of Gatsby and the parties in his mansion are a good proof of the lack of moral values in this fictional representation of Long Island.

#### **5.3.1. The Green Light**

One of the first key symbols to appear in the novel is the so-called green light that appears at the end of Daisy's dock. We are aware of this light when Nick Carraway sees Gatsby for the first time, although the two do not interact with each other. This green light represents the past and the future that unites Gatsby with Daisy. The dreams and hopes of that relationship, and the destiny that escapes them before our eyes, are reflected in this flickering light. At the end of the first chapter, the image of the green light appears, as Carraway sees it and before he meets Gatsby. We get a description of him trying some movements to achieve something he can't reach. From his point of view during the scene, Carraway says that “he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and far as I as from him I could have sworn he was trembling.

Involuntarily I glanced seaward and distinguished nothing except a single green light, minute and far away, that might have been the end of a dock”(25). This scene represents a metaphor that, although Gatsby fights for his own dream, the symbolism of the green light that symbolizes Daisy and the desires he always has been waiting for, will never come true.

### 5.3.2. The Valley of Ashes

In the novel's portrayal of time and place, the valley of ashes is a great wasteland that stretches between the city of New York and West Egg, where the new rich live. The meaning or symbolism that holds this place is that it represents the corruption that existed in society at the time and the moral decay of the American people as a result of a carefree lifestyle and lascivious, especially wealthy people during the 1920s, known as "Happy Twenties". At the beginning of the second chapter, we can see how Carraway depicts this wasteland in detail, as he and Tom were travelling to New York by train. During the trip, Nick pays attention to the place and says, “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 men who move dimly and already rumbling through the powdery air” (26). This area of Queens is set between West Egg and Manhattan, and the characters place emphasis on the ashes because this valley is the place in which the railroad and factories are located.

### 5.3.3. The Eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg

Located in the place we mentioned above, the valley of ashes, the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg oversee the desolate wasteland on the heights of a billboard set by some eye doctor in New York City. The image of the ad shows a part of some big blue eyes, which are covered by yellow spectacles. This billboard is set near George Wilson's Garage, and these inert eyes represent a counterpoint to the place where they are established, since they somehow have a record of everything that happens in the story.

Every character has an opinion about this pair of eyes, but it is clear that they don't simply exist in space, due to the fact that they are somehow looking out and persistently stare. The first time we are aware of the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg occurs at the beginning of chapter two, while Carraway and Tom are walking through the valley of ashes to arrive at Wilson's Garage. During the walk Carraway sees this billboard and says, "but above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. They are blue and gigantic, their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a nonexistent nose" (26-27).

#### 5.3.4. Jay Gatsby – His Mansion and Parties

The character of Gatsby itself already is a symbol by means of the role that it represents in his work, but mainly by its actions throughout the plot, as well as by its parties and acquisitions. Everything that Gatsby does has as its main purpose attracting Daisy and recovering the time lost during those years in which Gatsby was fighting in the War and in which Daisy decided to get married. The time in which the story takes place is clear. The Happy Twenties, as Bradbury says, "are a paradoxical decade. The nineteen twenties can in fact be neatly separated as a period of illusion between two severe political realities, the end of the World War One and the Wall Street Crash of 1929, which in turn discredited the entire social and political action of the Jazz Age" (11-12). Gatsby, with all his celebrations, gives people wings to express their lives entirely in an environment of uncontrolled festivity.

Gatsby and everything around him is concerned to obtain Daisy's unconditional love. To do this, there must be an insurmountable circumstance that moves many of Gatsby's actions throughout the plot, recovering a past time in which these characters met and fell in love. In a dialogue that Nick and Gatsby keep after one of their parties, Gatsby tells him his intentions and Nick responds, "I would not ask him too much, the past can't come back"(106), and then, in the same conversation Gatsby answers the following: "The past can't return? Of course, everything will remain as before and she

will realize"(106). Following these excerpts, is evident Gatsby's obsession for Daisy, the idea of undoing all that had happened in these years and escaping together. This plan later will fail before the refusal of Daisy, and Gatsby realizes that she is not the same person that he knew before. After Gatsby's death, Nick highlights how people change and how wealth corrupts people, in the case of Daisy and her husband. In the following days, Carraway, finds himself alone with the tasks concerning the funeral. He understands the real nature of rich people like Daisy and Tom and he thinks: "Tom and Daisy were careless, they crushed things and people and then they took refuge in their money, or in what held them together, leaving the others to fix the damage they had caused"(170).

#### **5.4. Principal Themes**

The three major themes that appear in this novel are a reflection of the worries of some people who inhabited the United States during the 1920s. Love and sexual freedom were a demand for Americans, and they stopped seeing them as a taboo, and this is portrayed in the novel through affairs, and liberation on issues of sexuality became increasingly widespread. Closely related to the previous theme, we find the main motivation or cause of the splendor in America after the World War One, the American dream and its subsequent decline. During the "Happy Twenties", both the natives and the immigrants had the certainty that everything was possible in America, due to the great wealth that existed at the time, which led to large numbers of people moving to big cities and the economy grew without limits. All this time of "prosperity" was disrupted with the arrival of the Great Depression. Thus, in *The Great Gatsby* we see how the author is responsible for showing us all the wealth that some people formed during those years, West Eggs vs East Egg, and how the richest people in society lived in an idyllic situation, where appearances, money and wealth became very important parts of the plot.

##### **5.4.1. Love and Relationships**

Although a great number of critics think that the story depicted in this novel corresponds to a new myth of the society of the moment, the American dream, represented by means of a satire in New York of the twenties, on the surface *The Great Gatsby* is a tragic love story. And the relationships between the characters connect with and deepen in other subjects present in the novel, such as money, social class and other aspects. Love, as Chambers says, “is the most significant characteristic to illustrate an ironical-tragic view of the novel. In all his novels Fitzgerald’s treatment of man’s most fundamental illusion, that he is destined to achieve happiness, is aimed upon the illusion that it is love which will transport him to a magical world of eternal happiness”(96).

Fitzgerald's representation of love in this story is complex, so for a better understanding, we will divide this section into four parts, according to the different relationships: Daisy and Tom, George and Myrtle, Gatsby and Daisy, Jordan and Nick. Some are more significant than others, and as we can see after reading the novel, during the course of the plot we find two well-differentiated love triangles: Daisy-Tom-Gatsby; and Tom-Myrtle-Wilson. We will also observe how these relations advance during the course of the plot and how some are involved in others.

#### 5.4.2. The American Dream and its Decay

Fitzgerald, through this work framed in the 1920s, presents a particular vision of the American dream, a rather pessimistic one. We can establish that this notion of the American dream corresponds to that established by Bewley: “in *The Great Gatsby*, the twenties are not glamourized. The period is presented as a corrupt, amoral and violent time, in which loneliness, frustration and lost spiritual values are typical, and in which violent death is ever present. In this climate the American dream has undoubtedly withered” (quoted in Matterson 28). This accurate and generalist description basically indicates the idea that surrounds this concept, but Fitzgerald portrays in his work the hidden face of this dream.

*The Great Gatsby* was published in 1925, shortly before the Great Depression came to America, and one alternative view to the concept of the withering of the American dream is one established by Matterson: “an alternative view is that Fitzgerald

criticizes the American dream as it has always existed, since it is an illusion that humans could never have fulfilled. Several kinds of evidence can be presented for this view: the use of the past in the novel, the kind of dream that Gatsby embodies, and the contrast between East and West” (31). Fitzgerald intends to emphasize in his work a vision far removed from the one that celebrates that ecstasy of exaggerated wealth, and it is focused on the hidden face that reveals the social classes and the society of the time.

#### 5.4.3. Materialism – Pomp and Wealth

The presence of money and wealth are a constant in the plot of *The Great Gatsby*, and Fitzgerald highlights with some characters how money changes people. In this novel, money and power serve as motivators in the relationships between characters, and the results that derive from certain actions or behavior because of that wealth. A large number of characters are shown as people with materialistic aspirations, present motivations that are driven by the desire to possess more and more things and spend money carelessly. Gatsby, Tom and Daisy are the greatest expression of this behavior.

There are clear examples of this kind of behavior in the course of the plot. In chapter one we see by means of Carraway how some people behave when they display a huge amount of money: “why they came East I don’t know. They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together”(11). In others words, some other critics argue that the novel is about rich people depicted in a particular way. Matterson, for example, says: "*The Great Gatsby* is certainly a novel about the rich, but without commending its glamor but it tells us what it is that they do to preserve their social status, closing the circle against outsiders and intruders” (30). Representatives of this description would be the marriage of Daisy and Tom, and to a lesser extent, Jay Gatsby.

At the same time, we must make a distinction between the place where the events of the plot unfold, and which places directly affect the representation of wealth and power in two different ways. We speak of East Egg and West Egg, the great territories where the wealthiest people lived, located on the outskirts of New York. The

main conflict in the novel starts with the distinction of places for living, as Mizener, for example, states: “in a small way, this conflict is reflected in West Egg and East Egg, since Tom and Daisy live on the fashionable Eastern side, while Nick and Gatsby are on West Egg” (quoted in Matterson 34). On the other hand, West Egg was the territory in which people lived with new fortunes. The inhabitants were self-made, had recently gained their wealth and were usually from working-class families. So we can easily get the idea that people living on East Egg despised all those settled in West Egg. The only exception we find in this aspect is the protagonist and narrator, Nick Carraway. As Ornstein says, "one of the exceptions was Nick: he lived in West Egg despite having family ties rooted necessarily in East Egg" (quoted in Matterson 34).

## **6. The Society of the Twenties (The Roaring Twenties)**

F. Scott Fitzgerald coined the term "Jazz Age" to describe a period of economic prosperity that America enjoyed for several years in the 1920s, those years also being known as the "Roaring Twenties." This prosperity benefited all of society in general and caused the economy to grow at a speed never seen before. Sectors such as the automotive industry, food industry or advertising were developing in a vertiginous way. The "American way of life" seduced everyone. Mass shows, new tendencies in dressing and musical trends occupied much of the leisure and lifestyle during those years. It was also an era of radical changes in mores and lifestyles. A stream of authors agree in some facts, for instance Bradbury, who says: “the new wealth did what progressivism could not: it shifted the USA from a production to a consumption-centred economy, redistributed income, and split the past from the present, the country from the city. With changing patterns of wealth and with new generational values came a new kind of Americanness: the age of Prohibition and puritanism, was also the age of black jazz, flappers, filmstars and metropolitanism” (75).

Otherwise, themes such as sexuality ceased to be a forbidden subject, and the youth society of the 1920s grew to its development during this decade. For instance Fass, who says: “the young, reared in a moral standard in which all sex was taboo,

redefined that standard according to their own needs and laid the basis for a change in the standard itself. Together the new insight and the old tradition resulted in a significant restructuring of premarital forms of sexual behaviour” (261-262). Another important event during this decade was the implantation of the industrial production of cars and Fordism. Palmer points this out in these forms: “Ford’s rags-to-riches story made him the modern personification of the “American dream”. Fordism presaged the revolutionary changes in manufacturing techniques and in workforce management which helped stimulate industrial production to unprecedented levels during the Twenties” (11). Other circumstances of American life in the 1920s such as Prohibition, affected the whole society. Kyvig explains it in these lines: “the Eighteenth Amendment brought the federal government into people’s daily lives in a fashion never before experienced in peacetime. National prohibition made it a crime to sell, but not to purchase or use alcoholic beverages, leaving many people with conflicted feelings about personal decisions on whether or not to drink” (1). During the so-called “Jazz Age”, as Shaw points out, “there were three emblematic figures: the flappers, the Charleston dance and the gangster” (9-10). The flappers and Charleston were focused among the roaring parties, while the figure of the gangster was related to alcohol smuggling. *The Great Gatsby* is considered one of the classics of American literature because of its faithful portrayal of the 1920s, a very important time in modern American history. The reason why this time is known as the "Happy Twenties" is the environment in which American society emerged after the end of World War One. At this time society experienced values that were corrupt and a collapse of the spiritual sense of its inhabitants took place. Garret, for instance, states that "in *The Great Gatsby*, the twenties do not reflect glamor. This period is represented as corrupt, immoral and violent in which loneliness, frustration and loss of spiritual values are typical and a society in which the presence of a violent death is always present" (quoted in Matterson 40). Fitzgerald explores several aspects of contemporary American life, such as adultery, alcoholism and its smuggling and the rapid accumulation of wealth. Prohibition against alcohol consumption made smuggling may profitable. Other key aspects of the novel include organized crime and the status and liberation of women.

Although this decade of the 1920s was a period of great optimism for the American people, Fitzgerald portrays the dark side of this golden age, focusing on the hidden face of wealth, hypocrisy, which hides behind the appearances of the lifestyle of the wealthiest people, poverty, the contrast between West Egg and East Egg, the imprudence of the acts of the people generated by this society and its consequences. The author himself made a kind of summary after that decade and he states that “the uncertainties of 1919 were over, there seemed little doubt about what is going to happen, America was going on the greatest and there was going to be plenty to tell about it. The whole golden boom was in the air, its splendid generousities, its outrageous corruptions and the tortuous death struggle of the old American Prohibition” (quoted in Bradbury 73). *The Great Gatsby* thus seems to be a memorial about what was expected to happen during the twenties, and about the reality that led to the Great Depression.

## **7. Conclusions**

As stated in the objectives section of this Final Degree Essay, the thesis proposed is to defend the importance of the typology of the main characters embodied in the novel *The Great Gatsby*. We have also detailed the union between them and other important aspects of our novel. After the completion of this Final Degree Essay, I argue that the relevance, behavior and manner in which the main characters are represented in the novel are key to understanding this work of Fitzgerald. After finishing my research, I draw the main conclusions of my study, which are the following: Carraway is both narrator and focalizer of the story from two temporal points of view; the other main characters are closely related to the appearance of several symbols and themes in the plot; and Fitzgerald's portrayal of the "Happy Twenties" is in large measure faithful.

Carraway acts as narrator and focalizer at the same time. He combines stories and experiences from the past with their counterparts in the narrative present. This overlap produces some of the most interesting effects within the text, specifically within the spatial, temporal and perceptive facets. The rest of the main characters generate an interaction between the themes that are treated and the values that they represent. All of

them are representative of elements in American society present in the 1920s (wealth, the American dream, sexual freedom and the role of women in society). In addition, the representation of this golden age is strikingly faithful to what happened in that decade, despite being a fictitious novel.

On the other hand, the link I make between my proposal in this study and another already existing approach is found in *The Great Gatsby: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (1991), written by Stephen Matterson. This Final Degree Essay and this critical work share diverse subjects, such as characterological analysis, a study of the symbolism, and other aspects related to historical subjects and of society. My Final Degree Essay shows a more meticulous approach to the main themes of the novel, as well as further research concerning the "Roaring Twenties" in the United States.

As a proposal for future research, I believe that this Essay follows existing criticism, but also deepens its analysis. Other studies might do the same. Aspects such as the symbolism can withstand a more extensive and meticulous analysis, if the researcher decides to examine other aspects of the plot, characters, symbolism and main themes. Likewise, themes such as the American dream, love and relationships among characters allow further investigation and lead to study according to different parameters.

## **8. Bibliography**

Bradbury, M. *The Modern American Novel*. Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bradbury, M. *The American Novel and the Nineteen Twenties*. Edward Arnold, 1971.

Chambers, John B. *The Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald*. Macmillan Education LTD, 1989.

Fass, Paula S. *Damned and Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s*. Oxford University Press, 1979.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Penguin Modern Classics, 2000.

Kyvig, David E. *Daily Life in the United States, 1920-1939: Decades of Promise and Pain*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002.

Matterson, S. *The Great Gatsby. An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism*. MacMillan Education LTD, 1991.

Messent, P. *New Readings of the American Novel: Narrative, Theory and its Application*. Macmillan Education LTD, 1990.

Palmer, N. *The Twenties in America: Politics and History*. Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

Shaw, Arnold. *The Jazz Age: Popular Music in the 1920s*. Oxford University Press. 1990.