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The Roaring Twenties and the Effects of Consumerism in Fitzgerald's Novels

Abstract: *Throughout all his novels, Fitzgerald demonstrates that materialism and consumerism may lead to the individual's disillusion and unhappiness. People, being focused on acquiring wealth and displaying their money and power, forget about the essential things of life, and generally they end up empty and unfulfilled. The double nature of money both empowering and dangerous leads individuals to their rise and fall, destroying not only them, but also the people close to them. Through Marx's concept of commodity, the article aims to demonstrate that people are dehumanized, while things appear to take on animate power. The more people lose their subject position and become objects, the more objects shift into subject position. Hence, social relations are transferred from people to things.*

Key words: *commodification, exchange value, use value, commodity fetishism*

One of the crucial aspects of consumerism is the way in which pervasive nature of consumption is reconstructed and interpreted on a daily basis. One definition is generated to some extent by the American Industrialist Henry Ford, who is generally recognized as the pioneer of the modern mass-production system. Fordism was based on the principles of size, uniformity and predictability. In this new system, the individual is concerned with the provision of the necessary surplus in order to be able to purchase consumer goods. Henry Ford introduced the idea according to which workers should be encouraged to be the consumers of the very products they make. The crucial development of the Fordist economy was its dependence upon the fact that workers had a surplus of disposable income which they could invest in buying a diversity of goods that were being made available to them. Consumption came to play an increasingly important role in the people's lives. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), for example, styles the modern era after Ford. Although partially a myth, there is some truth to this assignment. Fordism refers to the 20th century consumer society: high productivity means high wages, mass production equals mass consumption.

When trying to define consumerism, one also needs to take into account the causes for the rise of the phenomenon. Any attempt to define the relationship between consumption

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and consumerism will obviously meet with difficulties. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines consumption as "the purchase and use of goods" (Baldick 187). Similarly, Colin Campbell defines consumption as "the selection, purchase, use, maintenance, repair and disposal of any product or service" (Campbell 67). Since these definitions cover only the economic conception, they fail to capture the process through which, during the 1980s, the object of consumption, the commodity, came to take on some form of magical quality that also had value in the cultural area, "to such an extent that consumption took on a dual role as both an economic and a *cultural* touchstone" (Miles 3). The relationship between consumption and culture, one that is marked by intense mutuality, is acknowledged and analyzed by Grant McCracken:

> In Western developed societies culture is profoundly connected to and depend on consumption. Without consumer goods, modern, developed societies would lose key instruments for the reproduction, representation, and manipulation of their culture. The worlds of design, product development, advertising and fashion that create these goods are themselves important authors of our cultural universe. They work constantly to shape, transform and vivify this universe. Without them the modern world would almost certainly come undone. [...] Without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition in this culture would be impossible. (McCracken 21)

This definition extends the traditional view of consumption, including its cultural dimensions, making the study of consumerism a broader and more reflexive task than a concern for the relatively straightforward process of simply purchasing and making use of particular goods or services. In fact, as noticed by writers that focused on this topic, while consumption is an act, consumerism is a way of life, meaning that consumerism is the cultural expression for the ubiquitous act of consumption. And the parallel with religion is not accidental. Consumerism as a cult of the late twentieth century invades people's everyday life and structures their everyday experience, being settled in their mind as the answers to all their problems, an escape from the mundane realities of their everyday life.

The cause of this phenomenon is linked to the Fordist economy, or to the age when consumption became so important. It was during this time, that people were not only offered what they needed but also what they wished, while almost simultaneously wants turned into needs. People started to buy goods not for their functional roles but for their symbolic value, for the social significance they displayed. Gradually, the meaning of "to consume" shifted from the object which is bought to the human need which is fulfilled in the process. It is mainly since the Roaring Twenties in the United States that the meaning of consumption has broadened, denoting pleasure, enjoyment and freedom. Consumption has moved from a means towards an end in its own: living life to the full became increasingly equivalent to consumption.

From a sociological point of view, consumption did not emerge as a serious subject of study until the second half of the twentieth century. Despite the general tendency to see consumption as "ahistorical" (Yiannis, Lang 65), analysts have increasingly come to acknowledge that the social significance of consumption began to emerge far earlier. Consumerism did not appear shaped and formed in advanced industrial society. There are writers, such as McCracken, who consider the sixteenth century or the early seventeenth

century as "the date of birth of the consumer society" (McCracken 20), when the court of Queen Elizabeth imposed upon her subjects the need to be fashionable, displaying new clothes and items in order to show one's status as a nobleman. Whenever a true consumer society emerges in a modern sense, there are two general points to note. One is related to the expansion of trade networks around the globe, simultaneously with the cultivation of tastes for exotic commodities such as tobacco and spices. Secondly, whenever modern consumption occurred, irrespective of the historical setting, it is often founded on the myth of a Prelapsarian society, relating to the time before the Fall of Adam and Eve, a sort of nostalgia for a Paradise Lost.

In the eighteenth century, consumerism led to an industrious revolution. An increasing demand for consumer goods encouraged market development, and people began to work harder. Luxury items became available to larger sections of the population. The industrial revolution occurred particularly in England due to the British colonies, where slavery provided raw materials very cheaply, creating a very large market for British textiles and due to the discovery and development of the coal reserves close to London. Thus, by the 19th century the availability of goods increased, and mass press advertising became universal. Consumerist values became part of socialization. Individual worth and social value increasingly defined in term of purchasing power and displaying material possessions.

However, there are other analysts, such as Daniel Bell, who argue that in the Twenties "consumption society was emerging, with its emphasis on spending and material possessions and it was undermining the traditional value system with its emphasis on frugality, self-control and impulse renunciation" (Bell 79). Bell points out that if there was an intellectual attack on traditional values, it was capitalism itself that sent them into decline by means of advertising, the installment plan and credit card. Mass consumption, in his view, led to the eclipse of Puritanism and the Protestant Ethic and the rise of consumer hedonism which propagated the idea of pleasure and gratification as a way of life. Fitzgerald himself commented on the period in his essay *Echoes of the Jazz Age*: "A whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure" (Fitzgerald in Wilson 1993:15).

The rise of consumerism during the Twenties represented an essential transformation to the structure of American culture. The belief that hard work brings success and social respect was replaced by a new one, which did not laid the stress on work and saving but, on the contrary, on leisure, spending, and on the display of wealth. Consumer culture revealed that personality, attitude, and the image one projects publicly, by commodities like houses, cars, clothes, were of prime importance in establishing a sense of self and status. Thus, products were not acquired anymore for their ordinary domestic purpose, to meet a particular need but to reveal wealth and social status.

The trends of the Twenties that seemed to define the era: Prohibition, bootleggers and bathtub gin, the Harlem Renaissance, the Lost Generation, the Jazz Age, flappers, flaming youth, represented different aspects of profound shifts in values away from the rigid morality of the 19th century.

The transformation of people into objects and the turning of men into ashes are common in a consumer culture society. In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx understands the term "commodity" as being "an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human need of whatever kind" (Marx 125). Furthermore, analyzing commodity's fetish-character, he states that in a capitalist society, people begin to treat

commodities as if "value inhered in the object themselves, rather than in the amount of real labor expended to produce the object" (129). Marx's reading of the commodity's fetish-character displays a double change. First, the commodity form changes the objective characteristics of the products of labor; people are dehumanized at the same time as things seem to acquire animate power and social relations are transferred from people to things. Second, as money can take any form, objects have no material difference; thus, an object can be substituted by another.

> It is precisely this finished form of the world of commodities – the money form – which conceals the social character of private labor and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly. (168)

What is, in fact, a social relation between people, between capitalists and exploited laborers, takes the form of a relation between things. Gold and money are the reward of all human labor, much as in pre-modern societies the totem becomes the direct incarnation of deity. Through this process,

> Men are henceforth related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way; they become alienated because their own relations of production assume a material shape which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action. (187)

The majority of Fitzgerald's characters are obsessed with materialism and consumerism and because of that they have the tendency to value human beings in economic terms. Thus, they begin to treat people as objects, considering that everything and everyone can be bought and sold in a consumer culture society. The economic values seem to count much more than the human ones.

In *The Great Gatsby*, it seems that everyone else is using everyone to get what they want. Tom Buchanan for example is using people around him, no matter if they are male or female, to attain his target; for him everybody has a price. In *Psychological Politics of the American Dream: The Commodification of Subjectivity in Twentieth-Century American Literature*, Lois Tyson shows that Tom Buchanan embodies the concept of commodification, since he relates to the world outside him through his money; his marriage to Daisy is seen as an exchange: Daisy's youth and beauty for Tom's money and the image of strength. The string of pearls bought for 350.000 dollars is the purchase price for taking Daisy as a wife. Tom is also using Myrtle because he wants to get her sexual favors; for that he lets her think that one day he will marry her. Tom's acts of commodification are reflected in his expensive possessions as their sign-exchange value.

However, Tom is at his turn commodified by Myrtle, who uses him in order to assure her a better material life. Her focus on material goods and luxury in general, is evident when she relates her first meeting with Tom:

> It was on the two little seats facing each other that are always the last ones left on the train. I was going up to New York to see my sister and spend the night. He had on a dress suit and

> patent leather shoes, and I couldn't keep my eyes off him, but every time he looked at me I had to pretend to be looking at the advertisement over his head. When we came into the station he was next to me, and his white shirt-front pressed against my arm, and so I told him I'd have to call a policeman, but he knew I lied. I was so excited that when I got into a taxi with him I didn't hardly know I wasn't getting into a subway train. All I kept thinking, over and over, was 'You can't live forever; you can't live forever'. (*The Great Gatsby*, 24)

The things Myrtle is first attracted to, when she sees Tom, are not his physical traits but his expensive possessions. Because of their sign-exchange value, the possessions confer him a certain social status and this is exactly what Myrtle is interested in: a relationship with a rich man who can provide her all the material things, her husband cannot afford. In order to achieve that, she is willing to use any means necessary.

The fact that Tom does not even see Myrtle as a person but as a sexual object is made clear by his treatment of Myrtle at the party, especially when he breaks her nose for having the nerve to pronounce his wife's name: " 'Daisy! Daisy! Daisy!' shouted Mrs. Wilson. 'I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Dai – ' Making a short deft movement, Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand" (25). This is a proof that Myrtle would rather be treated like a dog by someone who has money instead of being cared for by someone who has no money. The nature of the relationship between Tom and Myrtle is best symbolized by the expensive dog leash Tom had bought for Myrtle's puppy. It shows that Tom is the owner, the one who controls things and souls, as he pleases.

Tom does not seem to have much of a reaction when he sees Myrtle dead. He immediately approaches her husband George and begins talking about the yellow car that hit her, explaining that it is not his car. When he and Daisy meet at their house, they are seen sitting calmly together, as if nothing had happened: "Myrtle Wilson's body, wrapped in a blanket, and then in another blanket, as though she suffered from a chill in the hot night, lay on a work-table by the wall, and Tom, with his back to us, was bending over it, motionless" (88). His attitude suggests that Tom has a definite cold feeling toward Myrtle's death; he simply wants to make sure that he and Daisy get away from the situation; Myrtle's dead body does not impress him in any way.

Tyson notices that Daisy herself "is not merely an innocent victim of her husband's commodification, but an agent" 2006:71). She wants Tom's sign exchange value, and this is her reason for marrying him. Even her affair with Gatsby is based on a commodified view of life. If he had not been rich and able to take care of her, she would have never become interested in him. The apparent ease with which she lets Gatsby take the blame for Myrtle's death, indicates her commodification of people. From this point of view Daisy and Tom are alike, as both sacrifice other people to their benefit. The fact that none of them goes to Gatsby's funeral, nor sends a flower, proves that both treat him as a commodity, as a thing without any importance.

Even Jay Gatsby, the character who seems to embody the American Dream, commodifies his world. His possessions have only exchange-value and not use-value. We are told that the only room Gatsby occupies in his big house is his simple bedroom. He almost never uses his library, pool, or hydroplane. He does not drink alcohol or know most of the guests from his extravagant parties. Tyson believes that Daisy represents for Gatsby

the ultimate image of sign-exchange value he wants to acquire in order to be accepted in her socio-economic class.

> Possessions of Daisy, the ultimate commodity sign, would, in Gatsby's eyes "launder" his new money, and make it "old", would make it "spanking new" imitation Hotel de Ville an ancestral seat. Thus, in accumulating material goods in order to win Daisy, he accumulated one kind of commodity sign in order to acquire another. (Tyson 2006:91)

The idea that Daisy is seen as a commodity by Gatsby is reinforced by her relation to financial prosperity: "her voice is full of money" (*The Great Gatsby*, 76), and by her belief that the best thing a woman can be is a beautiful "fool" (13). All these lead the reader to assume that she is a character that has been created to display sign-exchange value rather than substance. Daisy has become for Gatsby an identity commodity, an "image which might mask the deficiencies of his origins" (Goldsmith 447), by which Goldsmith means a desirable material signifier, just like his house, car, and his extravagant parties.

In his essay "F. Scott Fitzgerald's Evolving American Dream", John F. Callahan states that even in Gatsby, sooner or later human feelings are negotiated in relation to property. Daisy is turned into a possession when Gatsby and Tom are both disputing her; for Buchanan she is a material possession, whereas for Gatsby she represents an ideal. At some point in the novel, it is mentioned that Gatsby sees Daisy as the "grail" (*The Great Gatsby*, 95). This feeling is reinforced in other passages too, such as when Nick notices that Daisy's value is raised in Gatsby's eyes because a lot of men loved her: "it excited [Gatsby] too that many men had already loved Daisy--it increased her value in his eyes" (94). Daisy is displayed as a commodity with a high value, because she is desired by other men. Thus, she becomes a luxury item.

Moreover, Gatsby is turning not only Daisy into a commodity, but also all the people from his parties, as he is not interested neither in knowing them nor in socializing with them. His only interest is to populate the house with interesting, well-known people, in order to attain his target, attiring Daisy's attention. The remark he makes concerning the people living in his house is revelatory for his commodification of people: "I keep it [the house] always full of interesting people, night and day. People who do interesting things. Celebrated people" (58). One of the women present at his parties is seen by Gatsby as an orchid: "Perhaps you know that lady, Gatsby indicated a gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman who sat in state under a white-plum tree" (67). Thus, people are seen as objects, decorating his house.

In *The Great Gatsby and Modern Times*, Berman considers that marketplace relations dominate all relations in the text. The language of the marketplace infiltrates everywhere. Wilson cannot tell the difference between God and an advertisement; Nick sees Jordan for the last time, "thinking she looked like a good illustration" (138).

> Commodities are definitions: Wilson knows that Tom's car is the equivalent of his own going west to start a new life; Gatsby knows that his gorgeous and melodic car establishes his status". (27)

Moreover, Gatsby's smile is also seen as a reproducible commodity, even if at first it appears to denote singularity:

> He smiles understandingly – much more than understandingly. It was one of the rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced – or seemed to face – the whole external 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, believed 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. (*The Great Gatsby*, 32)

In this passage Gatsby's smile becomes a metonymy that stands for Gatsby. According to Meredith Goldsmith in "White Skin, White Mask: Passing, Posing, and Performing in *The Great Gatsby"*, Gatsby's smile "works as a commodity that extends his social power" (450). The passage denotes the fact that Nick is fascinated by Gatsby's charisma. Thus, his smile becomes a commodity, something that he can use to obtain favors. This idea is underlined by Daisy's remark that Gatsby "resemble(s) the advertisement of the man" (*The Great Gatsby*, 76). In other words, not only the smile but Gatsby as a whole represents a commodity. His exaggerate care of the way his hair looks, his looking in the mirror, demonstrate Gatsby's commodification of his own image. He uses all the marketing instruments: possessions and physical traits, to construct his self, and finally he sells his image to the others.

In *Tender is the Night*, the main character, Dick Diver, is turned into an object by the Warrens, who consider that the best solution for Nicole's recovery is the marriage with her psychiatrist. Thus, Dick is turned into a commodity, bought by the Warrens to do his job-making Nicole feel better. In "Money Makes Manners Make Man Make Woman: *Tender is the Night*, a Familiar Romance?" Godden remarks that the novel is "balanced between residual and emergent economic forms" (Godden 29). Dick is aware of the fact that money corrupted him and turned him into a failure; he loses interest in himself as an individual because he realizes he is a subject produced by capitalist forces. Fitzgerald uses the figure of the psychiatrist, a "professional guardian of the unthinkable" (30), as his protagonist because the "history of what a class finds unthinkable is one measure of how that class maintains its integrity despite economic transition" (30). As economic forces dismember individuals, psychoanalytic theory is meant to explain how the subdivided person holds together. For Fitzgerald, then, the psychiatrist is guardian of both subconscious and the bourgeoisie.

At the end of the novel, after Nicole leaves Dick, she talks to her sister and tells her that he was a good husband;" 'Dick was a good husband to me for six years,' Nicole said. 'All that time I never suffered a minute's pain because of him, and he always did his best never to let anything hurt me.' " (*Tender is the Night*, 388). Baby Warren's answer proves that Dick was turned into a commodity, bought and shaped to do his job properly; "that's what be was educated for" (388).

Nicole may be in the position of a commodifier in relation to Dick, but she is also in the position of being commodified by her own father. After Mr. Devereux initiates an incestuous relationship with his daughter, all he can do is to invest large sums of money in

her recovery. When Mr. Warren first brought his daughter to a mental clinic in Zurich for help, he did not even have the decency to confess what it had happened, he just mentioned that she wasn't "right in the head" (16), and he underlined the fact that he had done everything for her recovery but he felt overwhelmed by the situation, and that was the reason for Nicole being brought there: "I've had lots of specialists and nurses for her and she's taken a couple of rest cures but the thing has grown too big for me and I've been strongly recommended to come to you" (16).

His indifference towards his daughter's condition is rendered by his silent refusal to pay a second visit to the clinic, even if he had previously consented to come. He even made plans to go back to America but he had not thought to let the hospital know about it:

> Mr. Warren's promised second visit. It was slow in coming. After a fortnight Doctor Dohmler wrote. Confronted with further silence he committed what was for those days "une folie," and telephoned to the Grand Hotel at Vevey. He learned from Mr. Warren's valet that he was at the moment packing to sail for America. But reminded that the forty francs Swiss for the call would show up on the clinic books, the blood of the Tuileries Guard rose to Doctor Dohmler's aid and Mr. Warren was got to the phone. (19-20)

Beside his detached attitude, his answer to the doctor's insistence to come to the clinic where he left his daughter under observation denotes his consumerist drives: "But look here, Doctor, that's just what you're for. I have a hurry call to go home!" (20). He treats Nicole as if she were a broken object, for which he paid a lot of money to be fixed. He does not understand why his presence is obligatory in treating Nicole because he considers that he did his part: he brought her to a well known clinic and paid the best doctors to look after her. As Mr. Warren says "money is no object" (19), meaning that he is willing to pay as much as it is necessary. What could he do more?

Analyzing Nicole's and Mr. Warren's relationship, Marx's concept of commodification seems to be reversed; Mr. Warren does not use money to purchase his daughter, on the contrary he invests money to repair her, after he uses her. Thus, Nicole is turned into a commodity. In "Fitzgerald's 'Figured Curtain': Personality and History in *Tender is the Night*" Bruce Grenberg states that Nicole's disorientation originates from her "awareness that her father had bred her victim to his lies. Her trust in him and in his self-proclaimed, selfless love had made her vulnerable to unexpected attack" (117). In this regard, the letters she sends to Dick are revelatory: "Come back to me some day, for I will be here always on this green hill. Unless they will let me write my father, whom I loved dearly […] So today I have written my father to come and take me away" (*Tender is the Night*, 11-12).

Her mind got confused when the loving father caused her such a terrible pain. And, what is even harder to her to accept is that he abandoned her emotionally, taking responsibility only for the financial part of her treatment. The person she loved dearly, especially after her mother's death, did not seem to care about her anymore. All her father did after the "terrible incident", was to spend large amounts of money on "lots of specialists and nurses, […] rest cures" (16) and voyages, and all her elder sister did was to encourage her in buying as much as possible, considering, that through money and consumption, everything can be forgotten and forgiven, even such a terrible experience as incest.

In *This Side of Paradise*, Rosalind herself is turned into a commodity by her mother, Mrs Connage, who assures her daughter of her high value on the market place: "you've been a very expensive proposition" (*This Side of Paradise*, 163). She advises her daughter to sell her image as expensive as possible in order to help her family, as Rosalind's father was not so rich anymore. In other words, Rosalind represents for her family a means of earning money. Thus, the family invests a lot in her, in order to become a luxury item, desired by many rich men. This is the reason her father invited some wealthy people to meet Rosalind: "her father has marshaled eight bachelor millionaires to meet her" (168). The merchandise has to be sold while it still has a high value on the market: "there are several bachelor friends of your father's that I want you to meet to-night-youngish men" (163). Rosalind has to be careful and not sell herself cheaply, to anyone.

Furthermore, people are also seen as objects in the novel *The Beautiful and Damned.* Gloria Gilbert, a beautiful and sophisticated young woman, is becoming a commodity in the eyes of Bloeckman, a rich man, one of his father friends, working in the movie industry. For him Gloria represents the trophy wife, just like Daisy is for Tom in *The Great Gatsby*, women who are taken as wives in order to be exposed and to ensure their husband's high value: "There was a wealthy man, middle-aged enough to be tolerant with a beautiful wife, to baby her whims and indulge her unreason, to wear her as she perhaps wished to be worn—a bright flower in his buttonhole, safe and secure from the things she feared" (*The Beautiful and Damned*, 531). It seems that this is what Gloria wants, she does not mind being turned into a commodity. She enjoys being worn like a valuable object, so that everybody can admire her. Bloeckman uses his money and power to purchase Gloria, while buying her a lot of presents: "within a month he had asked her to marry him, tendering her everything from a villa in Italy to a brilliant career on the screen". (543) Gloria would probably have accepted his proposal if it had not been for Anthony, who, compared to Bloeckman, was much younger and more attractive. He was not rich for the moment, but with his grandfather's money he could definitely become one of the richest man; and Gloria kept that in mind. The image of flower is also associated with Gloria when Anthony pays her a visit and she looked fresh like a flower: "Gloria, dressed in simple pink, starched and fresh as a flower" (539).

The idea that Gloria is turned into a commodity with her consent is also expressed in her discussion with Anthony regarding her ex lovers and her kisses. She admits that at some point a man told her that "he hated to think I'd been a public drinking glass" (581), and relates Anthony how she was amused by his remark. "I just laughed and told him to think of me rather as a loving-cup that goes from hand to hand but should be valued none the less" (581).

As in Daisy's case, Gloria is not a victim of men's commodification but also an agent. She commodifies people in general, as she likes being treated like a princess; everybody has to entertain Gloria and ensure her good mood:

> I want some of the people around me to be doing things, because that makes me feel comfortable and safe—and I want some of them to be doing nothing at all, because they can be graceful and companionable for me. But I never want to change people or get excited over them. (489)

By being turned into objects, people seem to have lost their human features and that is why Gloria cannot feel any emotion for them. They are used strictly to secure her protection and amusement.

In *The Last Tycoon*, the novel that concentrates on the glamorous but corrupt Hollywood, people are turned into commodities and used as long as they are new and shiny. Hollywood is described as being "a perfectly zoned city so you know exactly what kind of people economically live in each section from executives and directors, through technicians in their bungalows right down to extras" *(The Last Tycoon*, 85). It is obvious that in Hollywood what people do defines them. Cecilia Brady states that they "don't go for strangers in Hollywood unless they wear a sign saying that their axe has been thoroughly ground elsewhere, and that in any case it's not going to fall on our necks-in other words, unless they're a celebrity" (15).

When actors were acclaimed by the audience and produced millions of dollars, they were treated like kings and queens. As long as they were on top, their market value was really high and producers were willing to pay large sums of money to purchase them; when their moment passed, they were thrown away without any remorse and never remembered. Martha Dodd is an example of actress, who once had success and now was trying hard to persuade producers to give her a role. Cecilia Brady wants to convince her father, Stahr's associate, to do something in order to change the fate of people who were not at their climax anymore. "They never did anything for people like Martha, who had made them so much money at one time. They let them slip away into misery eked out with extra work-it would have been kinder to ship them out of town" (123). This passage clearly renders the fact that people are useful as long as they produce money, as long as the market wants to buy them; afterwards no one is interested in them: "the ones that are commodities are easy to replace" (146).

Not only persons are turned into objects, but also objects are endowed with human traits. One example in *The Great Gatsby* is the billboard that in George's opinion becomes the eyes of God: "That's an advertisement,' Michaelis assured him" (*The Great Gatsby*, 102). In Fitzgerald's novels, the car, a product of capitalism, becomes almost a character, being able to shape the life of the people who drive it. In *This Side of Paradise*, money is empowered with human traits. Rosalind states that one day, she will marry "a ton of it [money]" (*This Side of Paradise*, 164). Money has the power to replace the human presence; if you have money, then you do not need anybody, you have the support of money and that is enough.

Money is good to have but it becomes a problem when it consumes the person who wants it and when it destroys his relationships with the people around. This fixation with material things may also lead to a deformation of the person's perception of his own identity. Thus, the individual considers himself more or less valuable as a direct result of having or not having money. In *New World Coming: the 1920's and the making of modern America*, Nathan Miller discusses the habits of people in the consumer culture society and their lifestyle of excess. He cites Fitzgerald's words on the subject:

> "America", he said, "was going on the greatest, gaudiest spree in history". Money, mobility, and celebrity would be the motifs of the age and it would have a perverse duality: innocent yet worldly, sentimental yet dissipated, idealistic yet cynical" (Fitzgerald in Miller 10).

This obsession with money in the Twenties is found in all Fitzgerald's novels. It seems that money is the only motivating factor in society. His characters find stability not necessarily in accumulating money but in spending it in order to create a new image in the society, that promises to bring happiness and fulfillment.

By analyzing the material acquisitions of the main character in *The Great Gatsby*, it may be argued that Gatsby attempts to create himself, to make his world real. In *"A New World, Material Without Being Real: Fitzgerald Critique of Capitalism in The Great Gatsby*", Ross Posnock states that Nietzsche's theory would seem to offer the explanation that there is no real Gatsby; there are only images of him. Nick is making the readers aware that he sees Gatsby's act, understands the way the Gatsby he is showing here exists only as a narrative construct. Gatsby is neither Jay Gatz, the poor Minnesotan farm boy, nor is he Jay Gatsby, the child of an aristocratic family. Gatsby is whoever he wants to be, at any given moment. His entire personality is nothing more than a serious of gestures.

By wanting to appear what he is not, he erases his real self. Being focused all the time on producing money, no matter the means, and on using his wealth to gain love, he succeeds in nothing else than destroying himself and losing his life. His tragic end, being shot in his lavish swimming pool, by Myrtle's husband, seems to underline the idea that money cannot buy happiness and cannot save the individual from a tragic destiny. All his life was dedicated to earning money in order to purchase happiness and in the end, he dies miserable and disappointed, being turned into a selfish man, who cannot accept the fact that Daisy might have loved another man too. "'Daisy, that's all over now,' he said earnestly. 'It doesn't matter any more. Just tell him the truth- that you never loved him- and it's all wiped out forever' " (*The Great Gatsby*, 84). Gatsby must have Daisy all to himself that is why she has to erase her past with Tom. Generally, people who want too much end up with getting nothing; and this happens in Gatsby's case. He did everything in order to get rich, because he believed that wealth could assure his happiness. Fitzgerald is pointing out that power and love do not come together; one can have money but still long for unfulfilled love.

On other plans, Myrtle, wanting to surpass her condition, sells herself to Tom, hoping that one day she will become his wife. Myrtle's material pursuit leads her to a tragic end. Her death is like a punishment for her greed of money. Not only does she destroy herself, but she also ruins the life of her husband, George Wilson, a poor innocent man, for whom love and respect weigh much more than money. When he finds out about her affair, he is totally lost: "George Wilson [was] sick in his office - really sick, pale as his own pale hair and shaking all over" (87). His interest in Tom's car does not reveal his love of money; he only wants a new beginning for him and his wife in the West, because he is aware that Myrtle is not happy with their living in a garage. By making a profit, he hopes to make his wife happy again. For George, losing his wife means losing everything, including himself. His final gesture of killing Gatsby proves that he believes that there is nothing else that he can lose; whatever happens to him afterwards has no importance as his life ended once with Myrtle's death.

Tender is the Night proves that the pursuit of money leads to misery and destruction. In "Who killed Dick Diver?: The sexual politics of *Tender is the Night*", Judith Fetterley notices that Nicole's and Dick's drama can be understood on economic grounds. Dick wants Nicole to be well but his wish turns back upon himself, as Nicole may become well only at his expense. Not being able to transcend the economic relations, personal relations seem to be the main message of Fitzgerald's novels. In such a world, the interests of men and women are in opposition: if one gets more, the other must get less. Therefore, if Nicole gets better, Dick must get worse.

Despite the fact that at the beginning of the novel Dick has all the premises to become a famous psychiatrist and have a happy life, in the end he is presented as being alone, abandoned by his wife, with no career, having a drinking problem and involved in a lot of troubles. "Dick opened an office in Buffalo, but evidently without success. […] he became entangled with a girl who worked in a grocery store, and he was also involved in a lawsuit about some medical question" (*Tender is the Night*, 391). His failure as a man and as a doctor is because of Warren's money, which made him lose interest in work and dedicate his life exclusively to his wife's mental problem. Their money consumed Dick, emptying him and finally turning him into a failure. Money affected not only him and his love relation to Nicole but also the relationships with other people around him.

It is interesting to note Fitzgerald's choice at the end of the novel, to let Nicole watch Dick leaving until he becomes a dot: "but her eyes followed his figure until it became a dot and mingled with the other dots in the summer crowd" (386). The passage may have two interpretations: either Fitzgerald suggests that Dick alone, without Warrens' money, becomes a nobody, or on the contrary, because of their money he is turned in the end into a small thing, almost invisible. This is Fitzgerald's ability to express two ideas in the same time and let the reader make his choice. In either case, the idea is that at the end of the novel Dick becomes just one in the crowd, a person with no identity, consumed by the power of money.

Materialism and obsession with money also leads to destruction in the novel *The Beautiful and Damned*. Little by little, as the events progress, Anthony destroys Gloria and Gloria destroys him as each of them expects the other one to work. Because of the money and their obsession with Adams' fortune, Anthony and Gloria destroy their love, becoming two strangers. They start to quarrel a lot, they sometimes feel that they hate each other, and little by little they consume one another. "It was only recently that she perceived that in spite of her adoration of him, her jealousy, her servitude, her pride, she fundamentally despised him—and her contempt blended indistinguishably with her other emotions…" (*The Beautiful and Damned*, 462).

Both Anthony and Gloria forget about themselves and their feelings. The obsession with money is deeper than their love and in the end of the novel, even if they get the money, they become empty and miserable: "'That's him,' he said, pointing to a bundled figure seated in a wheel chair near the rail. 'That's Anthony Patch. First time he's been on deck'" (583). Becoming a wreck, he cannot enjoy his grandfather's money anymore. As regards Gloria, she is described as wearing "a Russian-sable coat that must have cost a small fortune"(401). She always wanted to have an expensive fur, so finally she gets want she wants from a material point of view. Yet, emotionally, Gloria cannot receive anything from her husband as he has nothing more to offer.

Moreover, their relationship with the people around them deteriorates a lot. Richard Caramel, Gloria's cousin and Anthony's friend, becomes distant towards them and when he meets Anthony after a long period of time he notices his degradation. It is a discrepancy between Anthony's image at the beginning of the novel, when he pays a lot of attention to the way he looks and his image towards the end of the novel when Richard Caramel notices that "Anthony was wearing a soiled shirt, that his cuffs were slightly but perceptibly frayed, that his eyes were set in half-moons the color of cigar smoke." (562) Physically, he is not the man he used to be and the rumors circulating about him and Gloria denote that their decadence is not only physical but also moral: "My God, Anthony, I've been hearing the dog-gonedest stories about you two even out in California—and when I get back to New York I find you've sunk absolutely out of sight. Why don't you pull yourself together?" (562).

Furthermore, Maury, Anthony's best friend, becomes also distant in relation to him. When casually they meet on the street, Maury does not give Anthony the chance to ask for some money. Their relationship had changed so much that he stopped seeing the Patches: "Don't you think that when even Maury Noble, who was my best friend, won't come to see us it's high time to stop calling people up?" (555). Consequently, all the relations they once had, are now destroyed. What is even worse is Anthony's guilt in destroying the life of his grandfather's servant, Shuttleworth. Finding out that he had lost all the money, he committed suicide: "Shuttleworth, the religious fellow, the one that didn't get the money, he locked himself up in a room in a hotel and shot himself" (583). Anthony is partially responsible for his death.

In *The Last Tycoon*, relationships are hard to develop; Hollywood does not allow people to be happy and committed to each other. Because of the corrupted world, the relationships between humans become tensed and insincere. Blackmail is something commonly met at Hollywood; people take notes about famous people around them so that, some day they could use them in their favor: "I saw him note it down in his account book to use some time. Out here these account books are carried open in the hand" (*The Last Tycoon*, 29).

The message that the novel may carry is that in a world where fame and money are dominant attributes, love and happiness cannot develop. Monroe Sthar is so absorbed in his work, he can "work all through the night to a single picture" (67), that he neglects his own person. His house is unfinished, his love, Kathleen Moore, marries another man and his health is failing down. At the end of the novel, Stahr realizes that all he has done during his life was working and gaining a lot of money, which unfortunately cannot help him become healthy again, or to assure his happiness. The fact that he cannot have the woman he loves makes him rebound to Cecilia: "it only took one of them [week] for Louella to have us married" (154). Anyhow, since he is not in love with her, it may be considered that he is a victim of the Hollywood's system and that he fails in becoming fulfilled. Despite his being on top, he is left alone.

The idea advanced by modern capitalism, that money can buy happiness leads Fitzgerald characters to a continuous pursuit of money and success. All that they seem to be preoccupied with is to produce money, no matter the means, and to display their wealth and power. However, the possession and exposure of material goods lead to a false understanding of the relationship between money and happiness.

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