

**THE REFLECTION OF THE ERA OF “ROARING TWENTIES”
IN THE F.S.FITZGERALD’S NOVEL “THE GREAT GATSBY”****Diadechko A.**

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The article deals with the portraying “Roaring Twenties” which marked a legendary and unprecedented period in the history of American society. Though this era goes back to the beginning of the 20th century, it has never stopped arousing deep common interest because of its uniqueness. Having been abundantly reflected in numerous pieces of art and literature, “Roaring Twenties”, synonymously named “The Jazz Age”, go on provoking public discussion and reevaluation. If viewed in literary terms, this epoch is certainly linked with the name of Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) and with his best known novel “The Great Gatsby” filmed five times. The writer is considered to be one of the best chroniclers of the American 1920s. Fitzgerald’s masterpiece had embodied many symbols and icons of America which travelled though one hundred years and still feature contemporary society. The article attempts to outline extra-lingual information and data that shape the temporal and cultural background of the novel. It aims at providing the readers with sufficient additional information that may significantly enlarge on the novel context grasping. It proposes a detailed description and interpretation of symbols and markers of the American 1920s which typically feature “Roaring Twenties” and the ways they are projected onto Fitzgerald’s story. In particular, the focus is made on American Dream doctrine, New York of the 1920s, the conflict between “the old money” and “the new money”, feminism and fashion, alcohol and crime, music, cars. Some parallels between the author’s life story and his characters are also specified.

Keywords: *Roaring Twenties, Jazz Age, American Dream, Prohibition era, bootlegging, jazz.*

Introduction

While Europe plunged into decline after World War I, the USA entered an era of its rise. The crash of the stock market in 1929 and the Great Depression were still ahead and did not seem to follow the economic boom of the 1920s. The decade went through exploration and learning, turned into an era of growth and changes. Veterans of the World War I returned to their working places and in this way welcomed an explosion of the USA industrial growth. American economy was largely consumer-oriented and entertainment became as massive as it had never been before. Profound social changes did not wait to follow. A new cultural revolution inevitably brought about new morals and manners. This period of joy and prosperity, spending money, and fun gave the name to the 1920s which would be remembered as the “Roaring Twenties” (27; 28). Those wild and shocking years are synonymously called the “Jazz Age”. The term is typically used to feature academic and pop culture when jazz style in music and dance became popular nationwide.

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American short-story writer and novelist Francis Scott Fitzgerald is believed to coin the term “Jazz Age” by publishing his short story collection titled as “Tales of the Jazz Age” in 1922. Actually, the term predated Fitzgerald’s book but its popularity was evidently boosted due to it. Later his best known novel “The Great Gatsby” in which jazz is immensely presented, tightly linked the author’s name with the term. In his literary pieces F.S. Fitzgerald made an elaborate portrait of this era. He is even believed by many to be its chronicler. Fitzgerald became a living symbol of the “Jazz Age” being deeply involved in its turmoil. His private life in the USA and France was publicly followed and celebrated as his books. But it should be admitted that to conceive and to grasp Fitzgerald’s texts and the senses which he had generated, one should have a careful view on the American 1920s which stay about one hundred years from today but vividly shape their historical, social, and cultural environment. And conversely, being acknowledged of this very specific period in the American history, one may feel more concerned when coming across Fitzgerald’s novel.

Thus **the goal** of the article is to study how Fitzgerald’s personal story, his literary career, the knowledge of his political, social and cultural environment, generally defined as background knowledge, can contribute to complete comprehension of the “Roaring 1920s”, this specific time period in the USA history. The text of his novel “The Great Gatsby”, which was written in 1925 to embody the “Roaring Twenties”, makes **the object** of the study. **The subject** of the study is to consider the information, knowledge, and facts related to the era of “Roaring Twenties” which though not being directly focused in the Fitzgerald’s novel, made their background, and which were once expected to be easily guessed and understood by contemporary readers but might cause a problem for today’s readers, non-native readers in particular. As for **methods** applied in the study, they integrate discourse analysis, context analysis, interpretation, and reference, based on guide books data.

The article has been written with gratitude to such American authors as H. Bloom, S. Buchanan, S.Churchwell, and others whose works touch different cultural and literary aspects of “The Great Gatsby” (Bloom; Buchanan; Churchwell). Other supplementary resources and guides have been also referred to. But all the supporting information has been systemized and arranged due to the author’s personal views and preferences.

In the 1920s, America partied and celebrated the promise of the American Dream. The American Dream conveyed social ideals that stressed egalitarianism (the doctrine of equal rights, benefits, and opportunities for all citizens) and especially material prosperity (Random...Dictionary:43). People believed that with enough hard work and determination they could achieve wealth. Primarily, they expected to have a chance at financial success regardless of individual differences (24). Geographically, the American dream was associated with the most developed and flourishing eastern part of the country and, particularly, with its heart, New York City (16). New York embodied American “East” which was synonymous to success and which thousands of people were striving to reach. In the 1920s, New York transformed into a city of impressive architecture (20). It became a booming center in which commerce, culture, jazz as well as illegal booze flourished. Its residents, migrants and immigrants, turned the life in the city into a decade-long party. Glamour and glitz colored New York. In 1919, Fitzgerald, whose engagement with Zelda Sayre had been broken because he had no permanent job, also headed to New York guided by American dream and determined to achieve immediate literary success. But all he could achieve was an advertising job for 90 dollars a month. All literary pieces he wrote in parallel were not financially successful. But already in 1920, after his first novel “This side of paradise” was published and brought him real success, Fitzgerald married Zelda and in 1922 the couple purchased a mansion in New York (9; 11).

Fitzgerald’s most successful novel “The Great Gatsby” is populated by the characters who are living their high life in New York of 1922. With their mansions on Long Island, which was a home for America’s wealthiest men and women, foreign diplomats, Hollywood royalty and socialites, they drive their car or travel by commuting trains to the city. The novel depicts streets, places, attractions, and the air of New York. “We drove over to Fifth Avenue, so warm and soft, almost pastoral, on the summer Sunday afternoon...” (Fitzgerald, 1973:

31) “The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and beauty of the world” (Fitzgerald, 1973: 71). Fitzgerald visualizes New York when mentioning the places his characters pass when driving or going by taxi. “We went on, cutting back again over the Park toward the West Hundreds. At 158th Street the cab stopped...” (Fitzgerald, 1973:31) “We passed...the façade of Fifty-ninth Street...” (Fitzgerald, 1973:82) The readers see New York with Nick Carraway’s eyes, whom Fitzgerald made the narrator of the story. Nick came to New York from quieter Middle West. Captured by its dynamics and hilarious atmosphere, he admits:” I began to like New York, the racy, adventurous feel of it at night, and the satisfaction that the constant flicker of men and women and machines gives to the restless eye” (Fitzgerald, 1973:60). “Again at eight o’clock, when the dark lanes of the Forties were five deep with throbbing taxicabs, bound for the theatre district, I left a sinking in my heart. Forms leaned together in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from unheard jokes, and lighted cigarettes outlined unintelligible gestures inside. Imagining that I, too, was hurrying toward gaiety and sharing their intimate excitement, I wished them well” (Fitzgerald, 1973:61). Jordan Baker is also expressive in her own adorable attitude to the city: “I love New York on summer afternoons when every one’s away. There’s something very sensuous about it – overripe as if all sorts of funny fruits were going to fall into your hands” (Fitzgerald, 1973:125). During the 1920s poverty was deliberately avoided as it is ignored in the novel by Long Island inhabitants when they pass the Valley of Ashes in their forays into New York City. This is the place where the city dump is located. It is also a striking symbol of time. But its view is behind the glamorous surface of the city. “...and immediately the ash-gray men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight” (Fitzgerald, 1973:26).

The privileged lifestyle of characters staying on Long Island is an excellent display of the new economic wealth of the 1920s (Random...Dictionary: 775). This part of New York deserves special mentioning. Long Island features some of the wealthiest and most expensive neighborhoods in the western hemisphere near the shorelines. Until the 1883 completion of the Brooklyn Bridge, the only means of travel between Long Island and the rest of the United States was boat or ship. As other bridges and tunnels were constructed, areas of island began to be developed as residential suburbs, first around the railroads that offered commuting into the city. At the close of the 19th century, wealthy industrialists who made vast fortunes during the Gilded Age began to construct large “baronial” country estates along the North shore of Long Island, favoring the many properties with water views. In a forty year period that spanned from the 1890s through the 1930s, more than 1,200 mansions were built on the Long Island’s North Shore, the Gold Coast, by some of America’s wealthiest men and women. Proximity to Manhattan attracted people whose estates led to this area being nicknamed “the Gold Coast”. Of the more than 1,000 grand estates that once existed, today less than a third remain and some of these beautiful estates on the North Shore are open to the public today. As a tourist guide states, these homes have stood the test of time, with many transforming into museums, venues and historical memorials of years past. Nowadays, the stunning great estates of the Gold Coast known for their sophistication and opulence highlight the 1920s Gatsby-era immortalized in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel (Abdolhamidi; Leidl; Thomson).

Brought into the 1920s, Fitzgerald’s characters live at two imaginary residential parts of Long Island named West Egg and East Egg. Their real location is quite recognizable with a look at today’s map of Long Island. West Egg was really the Kings Point end of the Great Neck peninsula. East Egg was the Sands Point end of the Port Washington peninsula. Today both peninsulas are home to the wealthy as they used to be in the 1920s (31). But in the novel these places are symbols of social contrast. Tom and Daisy Buchanan, who live in more fashionable East Egg, present the super-rich heirs of old families. They were born into the lap of luxury, and their greatest purpose in life is to remain there, no matter the cost to others. They exemplify the American elite. When talking to Nick, Tom explains ”Oh, I’ll stay in the East, don’t you worry. I’d be a God damned fool to live anywhere else” (Fitzgerald, 1973:14).

Gatsby's mansion is across the bay. Jay Gatsby's life provides an extreme example of American Dream. His parties attract the wealthy and those who still hope to become wealthy." By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names. The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath..." (Fitzgerald, 1973:43). The sheer extravagance of Gatsby's parties, his mansion, his numerous possessions display the new economic wealth of the era. Gatsby's parties are legendary for their opulence. He is indeed wealthy but he has to work for his money. He never earns respect like those who were wealthy from birth. A privileged lifestyle associated with "old money" does not easily accept the "nouveau riche", with those who made their "new money" (21). Tom scorns at Gatsby: "I don't give big parties. I suppose you've got your house into a pigsty in order to have any friends – in the modern world" (Fitzgerald, 1973:131).

Concerned readers can easily draw a parallel between Jay Gatsby and the author of the novel. Fitzgerald was not born wealthy. He was lucky to get money from his distant relative who paid for his education (first at St. Paul school and later at Princeton University) among the wealthy. Even staying among the wealthy, he was an outsider determined to find social acceptance through the only gift that he was blessed to have – his writing. Like Gatsby, Fitzgerald often felt he was an outsider even after he had got wealth.

The 1920s was also the era of Prohibition. The 18th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution banned the sale, manufacturing, and transportation of alcohol. But the law said nothing about the consumption of alcohol, and people found many ways, both legal and illegal, to obtain it (18; Random...Dictionary: 1041). Those who provided, distributed, or sold alcohol illegally were known as bootleggers (Random...Dictionary:152). The bootleggers, or rum-runners, would smuggle liquor from overseas and bring them to the secret speakeasies (Random...Dictionary:1239). Bootlegger business turned into a sophisticated type of organized crime. Money laundering and the bribing of police and other public officials in New York in the 1920s became very common. Unsurprisingly, New York City became the world capital of crime in which the Mafia flourished. Crime bosses like Salvatore Maranzano and Lucky Luciano became well known names in New York in the 1920s.

The "The Great Gatsby" is set in the 1920s, a time of increasing prosperity, partying, and alcohol consumption in the U.S. In the novel, drinking alcohol, often to excess, is a part of everyday life (2). Tom and Daisy's Buchanan lifestyle includes plenty of alcohol. Cocktails are served to dinner guests. Characters in "The Great Gatsby" enjoy whiskey, wine, and cocktails. Sauternes and Chartreuse which are a French sweet wine and a French green or yellow liqueur are read as drunk by the companies (Fitzgerald, 1973:78, 93). At the hotel, Daisy is going to use whiskey to make a julep (Fitzgerald, 1973:130), i.e. a sweet flavored drink made from a sugar syrup and alcohol. Gatsby and Wolfsheim are served highballs at the restaurant (Fitzgerald, 1973:72). In America highball is a mixed alcoholic drink composed of an alcoholic base spirit and a large proportion of non-alcoholic mixer, often a carbonated beverage (Random...Dictionary: 613). At legendary Gatsby's parties "... champagne was served in glasses bigger than finger-bowls" (Fitzgerald, 1973:50) and "In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials..." (Fitzgerald, 1973:42-43) Evidently, alcohol in the 1920s was illegal, common, and profitable for some people, Fitzgerald's characters among them. Gatsby rises from poverty and earns his fortune through bootlegging. He illegally imports and sells alcohol. Thus a war hero, and Fitzgerald knew what the army and war was, turns a bootlegger. Tom

accuses Gatsby saying:” He and his Wolfsheim bought up a lot of side-street drugstores here and in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That’s one of his little stunts” (Fitzgerald, 1973: 134).

Extravagant living brought changes into social mores, behavior, clothing, women’s roles in the 1920s. While the economic boom was accompanied by relaxation of the social codes and conventions, women, especially young and those coming from large urban centers, were among the first to rebel. Their social liberation took different forms during the 1920s. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified. It allowed women to vote. They began to display a more liberated demeanor. They began visiting clubs, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, and doing in public things which traditionally had been done only by men. The changing times were expressed through fashion. Restrictive clothes as well as attitudes had been gone. Both ostentatious designer accessories and careless-style outfits represented the lavishness and scandalous air of the 1920s. Traditional corsets and long dresses were replaced by shapeless shift dresses with which they could freely move and dance. Their colorful dresses went together with silk stockings and silk underwear. They gave preference to hats, shorter skirts, and boots (12). It is due to the boots they wore unbuckled, that the trendy women of that time got a new name “flappers”(Random...Dictionary:493). Their short, sleek haircuts or bobbed hair, bare arms, flat chests, application of makeup and smoking long cigarettes in public, redefined an idea of womanhood and what was ladylike (17; 32; 33).

While the men in “The Great Gatsby” are described in terms of where they live and what they do, women are described by the way they look, what they wear, and their relationships to the men. Sexual attractiveness is the key, which is based on appearance and charm. They are somewhat hedonistic and unconventional people who like to enjoy themselves. Fitzgerald describes Gatsby’s female guests:” ...and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile (Fitzgerald, 1973:43). In the novel ladies’ clothes often come in a white color. ”They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight about the house”(Fitzgerald, 1973:12). “Daisy and Jordan lay upon an enormous couch, like silver idols weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fans” (Fitzgerald, 1973:115). When Nick meets Daisy at his place “Daisy’s face, tipped sideways beneath a three-cornered lavender hat, looked out at me...” (Fitzgerald, 1973:87). In the 1920s, men also broke old traditions. Though not looking so colorful, they got some additions, like wide lapels, cream suits and pinstripes worn by the upper class. Sweaters became a radical addition to sportswear. The main male heroes of the novel, also look modern. Nick remembers as “Dressed up in white flannels I went over to his lawn a little after seven, and wandered around rather ill at ease among swirls and eddies of people I didn’t know...”(Fitzgerald, 1973:44). But it is Gatsby’s clothing that is significant for readers’ comprehension of him. He deliberately tries to look opulent in front of Daisy: “...Gatsby, in a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie, hurried in” (Fitzgerald, 1973:86). He is careful and particular about his clothing except the scene when he tosses out his shirts to impress Daisy. ”... he brought more...shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue”(Fitzgerald, 1973:94). Mockingly, Tom does not believe that Gatsby is an Oxford man because “he wears a pink suit” (Fitzgerald, 1973:122). When Klipspringer comes, he also demonstrates the male fashion of the time:” He was now decently clothed in a sport shirt, open at the neck, sneakers, and duck trousers of a nebulous hue” (Fitzgerald, 1973:96).

By 1920s, around 200,000 African Americans made New York their home city. Many of them had migrated from the South. During the 1920s, jazz entered the cultural mainstream. It appeared to be the main form of musical expression. As a result, Harlem became a cultural hub for dynamic jazz and blues as well as a platform for rising jazz artists like Ethel Waters, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Coleman Hawkins and “King” Oliver (Random...Dictionary:703). The musical genre became one of the most basic and potent

indicators of New York's cultural life promoted through recordings, broadcasts, and live performances (23). Simultaneously, many popular musicians played soulful tunes in nightclubs called "speakeasies" during the era of Prohibition.

Music played in the Fitzgerald's novel illustrates the new, often experimental attitudes as well as actions of the characters in the society that used to stick to conservative ideas (15). Contrast between old, conventional and new, not generally accepted yet, is displayed in the description of the party: "A celebrated tenor had sung in Italian, and a notorious contralto had sung in jazz..." (Fitzgerald, 1973:50). It is interesting to distinguish between real and fictitious information related to music in the novel. Both Mr. Vladimir Tolstoff and his creation "Jazz History of the World" performed by the orchestra at the party (Fitzgerald, 1973:53) are fictitious. But two songs played by Klipspringer "Aren't We Got Fun"(1921) and "The Love Nest"(1920) (Fitzgerald, 1973:97) were really popular and can be still heard on Youtube by anyone who wants to get a flavor of that time (3; 22). "Three O'Clock in the Morning" also mentioned in the novel as "a neat, sad waltz drifting out of the open door" (Fitzgerald, 1973:110), was composed by Julian Robledo and was really extremely popular in the 1920s. It is still available to modern listeners (30).

Though cars were new to America of the 1920s, it did not take them long to become a status symbol of one's wealth and success, a part of American Dream. Fitzgerald was aware of how cars could define a social status of a person. In his novel the cars speak a lot about those who own and drive them to add them significance. The writer purposely chooses specific automobiles for his heroes (6;7). Among numerous Gatsby's luxurious possessions (a hydroplane, two motorboats), quite predictably, two cars are also numbered. As Nick witnesses, Gatsby's "gorgeous", "splendid" Rolls-Royce makes a shocking effect on him as well as on others (Fitzgerald, 1973:66,71). Their admiration evidently pleases him: "I'd seen it. Everybody had seen it. It was a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length with triumphant hat-boxes, and terraced with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns" (Fitzgerald, 1973:66-67). "On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains"(Fitzgerald, 1973:42). Tom Buchanan is an owner of a blue coupe (Fitzgerald, 1973:136). In the 1920s, it was a luxury vehicle similar to Cadillac (Random...Dictionary:303). Before her marriage Daisy used to have a car to match her clothing. "She dressed in white and had a little white roadster..."(Fitzgerald, 1973:77). Being purely an American term, a "roadstar" of that time was an open car seating two or three. Interestingly, Fitzgerald plays on Jordan Baker's name who is very far from being a good driver. Actually, in her name he ironically combines two major car manufacturers of the time, namely, the Jordan Motor Car Company and Baker Motor Vehicles. The former is known to market and to promote its cars specifically for women with the focus on their appearance. As their philosophy went, smart-dressed people were expected to drive smart-looking cars (6; 7).

Conclusions

The wild era of the "Roaring Twenties" was over with the Stock Crash in 1929. But many symbols typically adherent to the "Roaring Twenties" have not gone with time. We still witness their echo every time we discuss rebellious behavior in public, bizarre fashion, illegal drugs, sex and violence in the movies.

American Dream has been living for about one hundred years and still makes a part of people's mentality even though in "The Great Gatsby" this dream is tragically colored. Material wealth and prosperity do not mean happiness automatically. The story told by Fitzgerald has been filmed five times with the best known actors starring. Probably, "The Great Gatsby" is still in fashion. F.S. Fitzgerald as a writer and as a person embodies national myths, dreams, and aspirations. He conveys something about human nature, human relations, human expectations and hopes that will always attract attention and interest. His real masterpiece "The Great Gatsby" will be popular as long as people hope and strive for success

and wealth. Gifted with lyrical style and heartfelt language he managed to capture the essence of the American experience.

This article has briefly outlined the temporal symbols and icons of the “Roaring Twenties”, both material and immaterial: American Dream, flourishing New York, fashionable and wealthy Long Island, excessive alcohol consumption, bootlegging, jazz playing and dancing, driving luxury cars. It has also notified the ways they are linguistically presented in Fitzgerald’s novel. The article can be of special concern for those whose interests lay both in American history and fiction.

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