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**NATURALISM AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE
AMERICAN DREAM: EDITH WHARTON'S *THE
HOUSE OF MIRTH* AND F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S
*THE GREAT GATSBY***

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ÖZET

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**Doğalcılık ve Amerikan Rüyası'nın Bitişi: Edith Wharton'un *Keyif Evi* ve
F. Scott Fitzgerald'ın *Muhteşem Gatsby* isimli eserleri**

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Amerikan edebiyatında doğalcılık akımı insan doğasını bencil, zalim ve egoist olarak betimlerken insanı içinde yaşadığı toplumun kurbanı olarak görür. Amerikan edebiyatında sıkça kullanılan “Amerikan Rüyası” teması ise doğalcılık akımının aksine, insanı, kaderine boyun eğmeyen, şartlarını her an kendi lehine çevirebilecek güce sahip olarak betimler.

Amerikan edebiyatındaki doğalcılık akımı ve “Amerikan Rüyası”, ideolojileri bakımından birbirlerinden farklıdır. Bu farklılık birinin kötümser diğerinin ise iyimser olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada edebi eserler, eserlerdeki karakterler ve durumlar söz konusu olduğunda hem doğalcılığın hem de Amerikan Rüyasının birbirine benzediği vurgulanmakta ve bu benzerlikler bir örnek çalışma ile gösterilmektedir. Çalışmada bu amaçla Amerikan edebiyatının en önde gelen eserlerinden Edith Wharton'un *The House of Mirth* (1905) [*Keyif Evi*] ve F. Scott Fitzgerald'ın *The Great Gatsby* (1925) [*Muhteşem Gatsby*] adlı yapıtları karşılaştırılmaktadır. Çalışmanın sonunda, yapılan karşılaştırmanın bir sonucu olarak, birbirinden farklı görünen doğalcılık akımı ve “Amerikan Rüyası” ideolojilerinin benzerlikleri çeşitli yönleriyle vurgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğalcılık Akımı, Amerikan Rüyası, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Materyalizm.

ABSTRACT

Master Thesis

**NATURALISM AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE AMERICAN
DREAM: EDITH WHARTON'S *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH* AND F. SCOTT
FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY***

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American literary naturalism portrays the individual as selfish, cruel, egoistic and as a victim of his/her environment. "American dream" is one of the most frequently used concepts of American Literature and contradicting naturalism, exhibits the individual as not succumbing to his/her fate and endows the individual with the power of turning conditions to his/her advantage.

American literary naturalism and the "American dream" are different from each other in terms of their ideologies. This difference stems from one's being pessimistic and the other's being optimistic. In this work, the similarity between American literary naturalism and the American dream has been emphasized in terms of the literary works, characters and situations in the works and these similarities are shown by means of a case study. For this purpose, in this work, American literature's most remarkable masterpieces-Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* have been compared. Through the result of the comparison, the seemingly different ideologies of the naturalist movement and the American Dream's similarities have been emphasized in various respects.

Keywords: Naturalism, American Dream, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Materialism.

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INTRODUCTION

Naturalism is a literary movement that appeared between 1865 and 1900. Following the realist movement, naturalism is considered to be very similar to realism because, just like realism, it favors an understanding that depicts individuals and life as they really are. Naturalism's most noteworthy characteristic is its way of portraying human beings as victims of their heredity and environment. For the naturalist, an individual's power over his/her destiny is rather weak for he/she is irrevocably under the negative influence of the mechanistic laws of the cosmos. Apart from the pessimistic, unchangeable atmosphere the naturalist exhibits, empiricism, scientific thought and observation play a central role in the naturalist movement. Thus, human beings are shown with a scientist's perspective.

The American dream appeared as a concept at the beginning of the twentieth century. First mentioned by historian James Truslow Adams, it embraces ideals of individual uplift and personal growth through ideals of hard work and diligence. The American dream's perspective on life is highly optimistic for it promises personal growth in every walk of life if humans live in accordance with the dream's ideals of hard work, good morals and ambition. The American dream does not classify and designate beings' life based on their hereditary traits, gender or race rather, it promises advancement to everybody be they white or black, male or female, poor or rich- it is egalitarian.

The naturalist movement and the concept of the American dream bear much binary opposition if compared. In the first place, naturalism sees destiny as a force with unchangeable negative effects upon the individual regardless of how hard one tries to change it. American dream, on the other hand, affirms fate to be something that is fully in control of the individual, leading to happy endings if one works hard enough. Hence, while naturalism portrays life from the pessimistic perspective, the American dream holds on to the optimistic aspects of life that fulfill the dreams and desires individuals aspire to achieve. While the naturalist novel's protagonist is

depicted in a constant struggle with the hardships he/she encounters in his/her path to achieving his/her goals, the hero of the American dream is portrayed as making use of the chances and opportunities he/she sees and turns them into his/her advantage. In short, the contrast between naturalism and American dream stems from the fact that naturalism's portrayal of life is full of impossibilities that are impossible to overcome and American dream's portrayal of life is a way of rendering impossibilities possible.

In this work, the idea that naturalism and the American dream share similarities will be proved by means of emphasizing the differences between two literary works: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

From the outlook, just like the naturalist movement and the concept of the American dream itself, *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* appear to be works that seem to have no common ground of similarities. *The House of Mirth*'s protagonist is a woman who is in a constant struggle of achieving great wealth by means of marrying a wealthy husband- the only chance of achieving aspirations for a woman living in the period the novel was written- however, the heroine is always trapped in handicaps that hold her back from her dreams. *The Great Gatsby*'s protagonist, on the other hand, is a man who has already struggled for his dreams and attained what he has longed for so long- wealth. when compared from the perspectives of the protagonists and events, both works clash in various perspectives. However, in this work, it will be stressed that both novels have more similarities than differences.

The House of Mirth and *The Great Gatsby* have especially been chosen to be analyzed for *The House of Mirth* is one of the best canonical examples of the naturalist movement written by Edith Wharton and *The Great Gatsby* is the most groundbreaking novel written on the concept of the American dream because it courageously states the disintegration of the American dream, that it is corrupted and its pristine ideals do no longer exist. From this perspective, Fitzgerald is the first and

the most important novelist to approach the American dream from a pessimist and critical tone rather than those writers who have looked on the bright side of the American dream.

In part I, naturalism will be analyzed in detail under the rubrics of the concept of existence and the concept of self. In part II, the American dream and its socio-historical context will be explained together with highlighting the most remarkable writers who used the American dream as a theme to their canonical works. In part III, a comparison between *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* will be made as a case study so as to prepare a middle ground where both books' similarities could be shown in the following section. The case study will cover issues such as the writer, the plot, characters, symbols and themes in general. In the conclusion section, both works' similarities in terms of plot, characters and ideologies will be revealed.

CHAPTER I

NATURALISM

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temple— Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat.”

Enlightenment was a period the world went through during the eighteenth century. It first occurred in Europe and then spread all around the world. This period was established on empirical thought, and it represented the end of the medieval age. By means of the inventions and technical developments the enlightenment period witnessed, the foundation of modernism started to be established.

Charles Darwin was a very big influence on the period and his views on evolution had their impact on the upcoming events of the 1800s. Darwin was a Malthusian, as “An Essay on the Principle of Population” (1789) by Thomas Malthus, the British economist, formed the basis of Darwin’s thoughts. According to this essay, the things humans needed to survive were less in quantity compared to the actual needs of the population. As a result, some would continue their lives without issue while others would starve. Furthermore, the essay stated that poverty, starvation and death were part of the game and would serve towards de-selection. Darwin believed that there should be variations among species so as to survive or fail, otherwise evolution toward perfection could not be fulfilled. Darwin also stated that variations were highly dependent on heritage. According to Darwin, useful inherited traits would survive while harmful variations were more likely to falter and die. While the order would select the ones with positive inherited traits, it would also make the defective ones become extinct. This is called natural selection.

As a result of an increase of new inventions, the industrial revolution had a strong effect on the second half of the eighteenth century. It was a time when manual

work was replaced by machines and when the rich became richer while the poor grew poorer. Hence, capitalism turned out to be more conspicuous than ever. The impact of this situation on culture and society was the pre-eminence of the bourgeoisie in all political and economic areas of life.

The capitalist bourgeoisie needed an ideology to justify their self-oriented, unjustifiable actions on the poor. This justification was provided through social Darwinism. The core of this philosophy was based on the views of the thinker Herbert Spencer who applied Darwin's views to human beings. Spencer initiated the term "survival of the fittest" for human beings who adapted to the circumstances better than others. Moreover, he favored colonialism, imperialism, and racism - namely, global domination. Stemming from Spencer's views, social Darwinists affirmed that social order should let the ones who are less fit die. They stated that, the poverty-stricken, colonized nations and minorities deserved the state they were in because they were unable to survive compared to those who were better off. In conclusion, social Darwinism was the key to understanding the rise in corporate power that claimed the right to exploit its workers.

All these events had their effect on literature as well. The inclination towards empirical knowledge, considering God dead and putting man and his senses to the center, led to the emergence of Naturalism. This movement appeared in the literary arena after realism. It was considered to be a continuation of realism and it is often confused with realism. However, there are slight differences that differentiate naturalism from realism. First of all, realism, as a movement, is in favor of depicting things as they really are; whereas, naturalism shows things based on scientific facts and human psychology. Furthermore, while the realist deals with the middle-class, the naturalist deals with the lower middle class or the lower class. Moreover, the realist is inclined to avoid problematic topics such as harassment and extremity. However, these taboos would constitute the main structure and theme of the naturalist novel. Hence, it could be said that, the main difference between the two movements is naturalism's tendency to concentrate on the representation of the extremity and the perversity in human nature.

Naturalism can be explained under the rubric of two main tenets: existence and the self. For the naturalists, human beings should relate their existence to physical laws and identify all sources of knowledge with empiricism. As a result, science and positivism forms the basic structure of the naturalist movement.

1.1 The Concept of Existence

Naturalism was first called “realism plus science” and it rejected fallacies and tried to shed the scientific light on life and human beings (Geismar, 1954; 3). This principle was first identified with the French novelist Emily Zola who, in fact, had formed the main structure of the movement in France between the years of 1850 and 1880. Early studies of literary naturalism were initiated with Zola’s *Le Roman Expérimental* (1880). According to Zola, a novelist should be like an empirical observer questioning nature and the environment he/she is in. Furthermore, he/she should object stable norms concerning will and ethics. Zola stated that our environment and own being were made up of physicality and they were to be comprehended through “scientific terms.” There existed no fairy tales in the world we lived in thus; a professional novelist was the one who would write as an objective observer rejecting imagination. Zola was under the influence of Luca’s and Bernard’s ideas and believed that one was a “product of his heredity and environment.” Zola stated that his aim was to examine moods and not individuals. He exhibited individuals under the influence of their psychology, physiology and lacking of volition. According to Emily Zola, human beings and their existence were to be observed and explained based on their physical structure. This would clarify a beings hereditary characteristics and physical adequacies thus, their fate. This was because men could not go beyond his physical capacities and could only live the life within their boundaries (Knapp, 1980; 21; Lehan, 1984; 529-530).

Apart from their physical qualities, a human being’s existence also depended on the unexplainable workings of the world which encompassed elements of luck and chance. Furthermore, just like an individual’s physicality, psychology, instincts

and their interplay with the mechanistic laws of the universe played a major role on an individual's existence.

The naturalist writers, as a result, gave much importance to depicting a character's hidden desires and psychology. They went into the depths of human psychology and revealed them in a scientific way as Coale explains in the following statements,

As Norris, Crane and Frederic dug deeper below the cracked surface of social convention; they began to uncover wider social patterns, veritable new mythologies revealed in the mental processes of mind. As a result these writers began to abandon the objective techniques of the realist In turning from the abundant details of character in society to concentrate upon one soul or two and in bending their visions inward; these writers approached the psychological and allegorical territory... (1976; 30)

For Emily Zola, human beings were to be considered to be living between two influences: their instincts and the laws of the universe. The reconciliation of these influences together with a presentation of scientific details would construct the main foundation of the movement. Hence, Naturalism is as supported by Walcutt "... contact with the scientific thought of the late nineteenth century which emphasized the power and scope of mechanical laws over human desires" (1940; 266-267). The protagonist of a naturalist novel presents him/herself as often struck by outside elements. His/her fate and existence are already determined and he/she cannot change them no matter what he/she does.

Apart from luck and chance, probability and improbability play important roles in a being's existence. For the naturalist writers, a being's social class, race and gender are the important factors in determining their social barriers. Accordingly, it would not be expected from a person coming from the lower segments of society to break through the hierarchical orders of the milieu they are a part of and socially advance. Thus, a great amount of an individual's life depends on their background and his/her future is predetermined by the probabilities and improbabilities depending on their particular background.

The African-American writers' stance on the naturalist movement was quite different from other naturalists in that they approached the relentless, mechanistic workings of the universe upon individuals from the perspective of racism. This situation placed the African- American writers' works somewhere nearer to the African- American criticism which subsequently affected their position among other naturalist write. One of the most influential naturalist writers of the African American literary arena was Richard Wright. Wright's masterpieces and his attitudes as a writer in his works are very pertinent on the grounds that they exhibit the basic traits of the African-American naturalist movement as Lois Tyson explains in the following statements, "Wright was a naturalist: he believed that the harsh, inescapable realities of racist oppression should be represented in straightforward, stark language in order to convey as powerfully as possible the evils of racism and the depth of black suffering. This is exactly what Wright did in works like *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945)" (2006; 390).

Social Darwinism was another influence on the movement. The phrase "survival of the fittest" gave way to the use of the concept of survival and social advancement in many novels. According to Naturalists, wealth and power were two important factors for an individual to survive both physically and socially. Social Darwinism shows its self in many literary works in terms of depicting the ones with wealth as the survivors, be they good or evil. Another theme related with survival in naturalist fiction was the ability to adjust easily to the situations and environment one found themselves in and to be able to face up to the difficulties one would encounter by having a strong attitude toward life. Stephen Crane, in his novel *Maggie*, portrays the theme of survival through his heroine who is represented as a mere failure for she is unable to be brutal enough to survive properly. (Fitelson, 1964; 184) As Fitelson explains in the following words,

Maggie, examined on its own terms, offers no suggestion of alternatives to the struggle for existence as the single appropriate metaphor for the life of human beings. In the world order of this novel, either one's life conforms to the demands of the struggle, or it is extinguished. There are no exceptions, and we have no cause to suspect that there could be any. Thus the naturalism of *Maggie* can be identified as a rigorous, Darwinistic determinism. (194)

Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* is another novel based on the theme of survival as well and this "struggle is dictated by circumstances" (Greenfield, 1958; 565). If one is fit enough to face up to the difficulties he/she encounters, then, as it is the same with the social Darwinism, he/she is considered to be successful, only- for the fact that he manages to stay alive. Crane's depiction of war is a symbol of life and the strife and struggles taking place in the novel are identified with the ones that one faces in life.

John Steinbeck is another novelist who uses the theme of survival as an indispensable theme to his novels. However, his attitude towards survival appears to be one that is depicted in a more conspicuously instinctual way. His understanding of survival is more similar to that of Charles Darwin. Steinbeck approaches the issue of survival from the perspective of a natural instinct rather than a struggle in a social chaos thus contradicting what social Darwinists put forward. According to Steinbeck, one must survive because he is in need of it, because it is a part of his nature. As Woodburn O. Ross states this situation in the following words;

...since humanity is a product of natural forces and since the profoundest biological urge is the urge for life, for survival and reproduction, the virtue consists in whatever furthers these ends. "There would seem," he writes in *Sea of Cortez*, "to be only one commandment for living: Survive! (1949; 433)

1.2 The Concept of Self

The second tenet of naturalism is "the self" and it encompasses the things that could be directly attributed to an individual, namely, his volition and conscience. No matter how much these elements seem related to the individual, they, in fact, cannot be considered independent from the deterministic elements and the mechanistic laws of the universe. An individual can make decisions with free will however; mostly these decisions are of no use because of the fact that he/she is controlled by social environment, heredity, instinctual factors, or chance. "Man" Emily Zola states, "is totally the product of heredity and environment, and the action

and interactions of these forces control his life. While man has a will, he does not have a *free* will, because his fate is governed by those internal forces within him and those external ones of his environment'' (qtd in Hakutani, 1967; 9). For example, Ellen Glasgow in her novel *Barren Ground*, depicts the protagonist's, Dorinda's, struggle of trying to overcome the difficulties of life and her abstinence in maintaining her own being both touches upon concepts of volition and the unfair workings of the cosmos (Kohler, 1942).

Many naturalist writers make the uselessness of ethical choices a theme of their work, for what is good does not promise happy endings in the naturalist movement. A protagonist might get involved in a heroic action. However, this does not promise him or her a happy ending or a satisfactory conclusion because creating a plot out of good choices which always lead to good endings would be far too utopian for the naturalist; nor is what evil is always incriminating because life in the real sense is not like that.

Stephen Crane's masterpiece *The Red Badge of Courage*, one of the pillar works of the naturalist movement exhibiting the pessimistic atmosphere of war, conveys the message that exhibiting the right conduct is what is appropriate to do. Nonetheless, it does not guarantee the anticipated results due to the fact that there are the factors of luck "predeterminedly" working on one's fate as well. (Greenfield, 1958; 570) Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is another novel that depicts the "complete absence of ethical plot-combination" (Walcutt, 1940; 267). Unlike most novels, it does not start depicting a protagonist with a decisive attitude and there are no satisfactory conclusions generated by the ethical choices made by the protagonist. In doing so, Dreiser works against the common morality patterns (Walcutt, 1940).

It would be wrong to think that under the effects of the outside pressures, the individual and his/her volition are of no importance. Despite the fact that decisions made by the free will of the individual are generally ineffective in terms of controlling one's fate, they serve to the self-respect and own being of an individual. An ethical, morally right decision taken by an individual makes him/her feel good

about himself/herself as well as allowing the individual to be true to himself/herself. Greenfield explains this as such; “man does have will, and he has the ability to reflect, and though these do not guarantee that he can affect his own destiny, they do enable him to become responsible to some degree for the honesty of his personal vision” (1958; 572).

CHAPTER 2

THE AMERICAN DREAM

If you work hard and play by the rules you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given ability will take you- Bill Clinton

2. 1 THE MYTH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM

2.1.1 Socio- Historical Contexts of the Myth

2.1.1.1 The Self-Making Myth

Since its discovery, America has always been a land of opportunity, a place where new beginnings could be made and dreams would come true. With every nation, many myths emerge during the course of their foundation. The myth of American Adam and the myth of the Garden are some examples that come to mind. These myths have a vital role in shaping a national identity and contribute highly to the unity of a nation. During the period of America's emergence as a nation, probably the most powerful myth has been the myth of the American dream because its ideals appeal to everyone regardless of their nationality, race and gender.

Reaching its peak with Emerson's *Self Reliance*, the myth of self-making has always held a remarkable place in American culture and history. It has gone through three phases over the course of time. John Cawelti has put forward three separate versions of the myth that have taken place in the last two centuries of the United States:

1) The conservative protestant ethic, 2) the formation of individual and social virtue first defined by Franklin and Jefferson and later embodied in the Emersonian dictates of self-reliance and the Chautauqua assemblies, and 3) the popular definition of the self-made entrepreneur, often broadly and somewhat incorrectly described as the Horatio Alger myth. (qtd. In Catano, 1990; 423)

Fulfilling the self-making myth is associated with individual strength, morality and a trust of the voice within. Being driven by the Emersonian view, these qualities are believed to lead an individual down the road to achievement and personal growth. John Cawelti describes the qualities a person should possess in order to fulfill the myth as such:

The Franklin/Jeffersonian thread of the myth clearly lies at the heart of a democratic ideal of the free pursuit of personal and social growth, and that ideal constitutes one of the myth's strongest positive appeals... The road to self-formation and fulfillment lies through the application of supposedly natural virtues- initiative, perseverance, honesty, familial loyalty... (1965; 6)

The myth of self- formation holds an important place in American society since it serves as a trigger to many aspects and areas of the culture, either political or individual, and contributes to the country's development in various ways. According to James V. Cantano "[it] appeals to ideals of democratic progress and individuality, to personal success and identity, and to a belief in the validity of virtues like initiative, perseverance and honesty" (1990; 435). From cradle to grave, the myth of the self-made man shows its self in every walk of life, first starting with the school life of an individual, and continuing to dominate almost every sphere of a person's life. Cantano explains the effects of the myth in the following words:

The myth of self-making is strong in American culture, enjoying a broad influence because it addresses an equally broad spectrum of needs. In politics, the myth serves to enunciate ideals of democratic progress and individuality, while on a related economic level, the myth helps to mask the disturbing presence of corporate power. In the arena of individual needs, the myth provides identities that seem to fit naturally into the requirements of society. And in education, there is a strong, positive value attached to the idea of interplay between self-formation and the acquisition of academic skills. The continuing presence of all these appeals can be seen in the following excerpt from a student's essay: A young child dreams of being rich and of some day being a famous business tycoon. He goes to school and studies hard the hard work pays off by his receiving many scholarships for his higher education. After graduation he receives numerous job offers from very prestigious firms from all over the world. He starts at the bottom of the business and works his way up to be a top executive. (Cantano, 1990; 421)

The self-making myth was widely related with immigrants who mostly reached out for the goals the myth offered. Starting from scratch, believing in themselves, working hard and becoming *somebody* were the ideals they followed in the road to self-formation. However, the influx of immigrants coming to America in the 1920s lacked the most fundamental qualities of the myth of the self-made man. They lacked virtue, good morals and purity. Contrary to the myth of the self-made man, and its pristine ideals, these new immigrants took a shortcut in their path to getting rich and got involved in illicit, underground activities.

[T]he traditional ideal of virtuous uplift, recently associated with the melting-pot model of immigrant success, was undercut by a growing interest in get-rich-quick schemes and a declining commitment to assimilating new arrivals during the Roaring Twenties. At this social climate, the moral efficiency of Alger's respectable "rags to riches" stories began to lose their appeal in America. (Decker, 1994; 62)

During the time when the act encompassing the banning of the selling and manufacturing of alcohol was passed in 1919, bootlegging appeared as a term and an activity referring to the highly profitable job of alcohol smuggling. Bootlegging was largely attributed to the immigrants of America who made use of this crime to acquire great wealth.

the Eighteenth Amendment propelled organized gangsterism to new heights and, in doing so, opened opportunities for new arrivals by creating a lucrative trade in illicit alcohol. It also activated the stereotype of the non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant as a gangster... (Decker, 1994; 60)

The illegal activities carried out by the immigrants during the Roaring Twenties gave rise to a movement called "Nordicism" which developed from reaction to the newcomers and their illegal activities and crimes. Nativism was a movement against the immense influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Nativism's power came from its fright of being deprived of the preeminence of the Anglo-Saxon race they believed had. Nordicism put forward many false assumptions concerning the immigrants and their racial background. Shortly after, these arguments led to racial offences and discrimination, and an advocacy of white supremacy. Racial supremacy was reinforced by the pseudo-science of Nordicism.

This situation reduced the respectfulness of whiteness because of the offence it made against other races.

The segregation-based actions taken by the nativists led to a transformation of the myth of the self-made man. The aspect of good morals did not accord with what the Anglo-Saxon self-made nativists did, thus, it could not be considered as a correct behavior and could not be justified. This attitude of the racist nativists resulted in reducing the respectability and credibility of the self-making myth.

Having lost its effect, the myth of the self-made man was replaced with the concept of the American dream. Having first been presented by the historian James Truslow Adams in 1931 in his book, *The Epic of America*, this newly emerging concept worked in favor of reuniting the nation which had been suffering from serious division. It produced a new understanding of hope for everyone, regardless of their class, race or gender. It was a concept which appealed to everybody, be they black or white, Jewish or Catholic, man or woman. It had the power of unity and optimism towards the future by favoring a national dream which was “shared” among everyone rather than being “tribal.” If the aim was to have a life in abundance, if the American dream was to be transformed from a utopia into a national reality, the “communal” “spiritual” and “intellectual” standards of the nation had to be higher than anywhere else. James Truslow Adam’s American dream was based on the ideals of “individual uplift” and “ethnic assimilation” which were considered pre-war progressive ideals (1980; 411). It is not a surprise to his readers that Adams ends *The Epic of America* with the optimist autobiography of Mary Antin, who talks about the Russian Jewish melting pot, initially published in 1912 (qtd in Decker, 1994).

The American dream provides hope for the individual who feels desperate, facing hardships. If one is poor, s/he dreams of getting rich and acts in accordance with the dream’s ideals. This is because of the fact that the individual knows that s/he has the opportunity of bettering his/her condition under the myth’s egalitarian ideals.

The American dream exists in the imaginary sphere. The real world is its foundation: but the dream reaches beyond what is to what is not- or, perhaps, to what is not yet. We might say that it refers to future possibility, the idea of which arises out of what we feel to be lacking in the now. (Greene, 1983; 179)

The myth of the American dream favored an understanding which did not differ from the myth of the self-made man. In fact, it was an outgrowth of the previous myth. The newly established myth would hold on to the pure, pristine ideals of good morals, hope, hard work and optimism. It was untainted and related to individual strength. Unlike the myth of the self-made man, it was not merely associated with the Anglo-Saxon nativists but instead, it appealed to everyone and promised individual development and uplift if individuals adhered to its ideals and worked hard.

Briefly defined, it is the belief every man, whatever his origins, may pursue and attain his chosen goals, be they political, monetary, or social. It is the literary expression of the concept of America: the land of opportunity. This motif has found its voice in such diverse men of letters as William Bradford and Walt Whitman, St. John Crevecoeur and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. (Pearson, 1970; 638)

2. 2 THE MYTH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN THE AMERICAN LITERARY ARENA

Having been hugely influential in American culture, the concept of the American dream was frequently used in literature as well. Many authors used the myth as the main theme of their novels. One of the best authors was Horatio Alger. He was a nineteenth century American novelist who published works about the rags-to-riches stories of people coming from poverty-stricken backgrounds and making their way up to extreme wealth. This rags-to-riches theme became known as The Horatio Alger myth. Bernard Sarachek explains the general background of a typical Horatio Alger's protagonist and how his fate is shaped as follows:

Horatio Alger's stories offer several variations on the "rags-to-riches" theme of the hero's humble origins. He is most likely rural born, but might be of urban birth instead. He might be an orphan, the son of an invalid father or the

son of a hard-working poor but honest father. He is apt to be native born, but he might be foreign born instead. He may have been born to a working-class family, a middle-class family that has fallen upon hard times, or, unbeknownst to him, to a wealthy family from which he has been orphaned. His natural parents are virtuous upholders of the middle-class values of the Protestant ethic. He may encounter evil guardian and stepparents, but some time along the way he is apt to be aided by an older, well-intentioned male benefactor. (1978; 440)

The protagonists in Alger's stories would not only aim at wealth and abundance but also seek satisfaction which was to be derived from intellectual enhancement. As James V. Catano suggests, "[i]n the Alger tales, the autodidact is the ultimate hero, and the tales' dual focus on personal growth and economic success lays at least equal stress on the former, with economic success often presented as the reward for striving to achieve intellectual growth" (1990; 424). Thus, education is the main priority for the hero of Horatio Alger stories and through his protagonist, Alger conveys the message to his readers that they should never give up and work as vicariously as they can as is evident in Alger's most widely known novel *Ragged Dick* (1867)

Dick had gained something more valuable than money. He had studied regularly every evening, and his improvement had been marvelous. He could now read well, write a fair hand, and had studied arithmetic as far as Interest... If some of my boy readers, who have been studying for years, and got no farther than this, should think it incredible that Dick, in less than a year... should have accomplished it, they must remember that our hero was very much in earnest in his desire to improve. (Pitofsky, 1998; 277)

In addition to the importance given to the protagonists' personal development, Alger paid equal attention to his heroes' gradual improvement and maintenance of dignity. Cawaelti supports this argument and states the following; "Alger assumed that poverty's child would be satisfied by a leap upward into a clerk's position, a leap not into riches but respectability" (1965; 101).

The step by step improvement of the hero would provide the readers of Alger's stories with the message that, "what Alger stresses in *Ragged Dick* is not riches but respectability...Urge for Alger- at least as he projected it in his fiction- was for middleclass respectability, not great wealth" (Elliot, 1988; 556- 57).

The plot of Horatio Alger's most famous work *Ragged Dick* (1867) develops as follows: Alger tells the story of a boy named Dick Hunter who is fourteen years old, without a home and deprived of parents. His father is assumed to have drowned. However, the protagonist, Hunter, is a boy who always looks on the bright side of things no matter what he goes through. As the story unfolds, Fosdick, Dick Hunter's friend, turns out to be the protagonist's teacher, and the hero soon proves to be so diligent that Fosdick, in the end, runs out of things to teach Dick Hunter. Horatio Alger repeatedly emphasizes the theme of conformity and an individual's diligence to belong. As a consequence, Hunter emerges as the stereotypical character of the "rags-to-riches" novel whose primary goal is never to become rich but to obtain a respectable place in the middle-class segment of society. The hero knows that the way to fulfill his aspirations is through "working in the right way" as Frank Whitney explains what working in the right way means to Dick,

You began in the right way when you determined never to steal, or do anything mean or dishonorable, however strongly tempted to do so. That will make people have confidence in you when they come to know you. But in order to succeed well, you must manage to get a good an education you can until you do, you cannot get a position in an office or counting room even to run errands. (Kenner, 1974; 15)

Hunter refrains from the dream of opulence and worldly achievements. He is a realist and he looks for a job where he can start from the bottom and improve his position. Consequently, he becomes an office clerk. Throughout this period, problems crop up but he never falters and is never led astray. Another theme emphasized in *Ragged Dick* is that worldly achievements and "compassion" are interwoven. As a result, the protagonist carries out generous actions. The more Hunter earns, the more he helps the ones who are in need. There are many situations in the novel where Hunter helps people when they are going through difficult times. First, he prevents an imminent "eviction" a family is to face by lending them the necessary funds. In the subsequent chapters, the hero helps a drowning child of a rich man which results in his acquirement of the powerful position he has always dreamt of attaining.

Horatio Alger states that in most of his books, he exhibited “the life and experiences of the friendless and vagrant children who are now numbered by thousands in New York and other cities” (qtd. in Scharnhorst and Bales; 86). Alger was very successful in his first work which resulted in the publication of other works such as: *Tattered Tom*, *Mark and the Match Boy*, *Wait and Win*, *Ben the Luggage Boy* and *Luck and Pluck*. These novels were much the same in theme and subject matter as *Ragged Dick*, starting with the portrayal of the lonely, good-hearted protagonist and his dream of obtaining a “respectable” life and proceeding through his acts of generosity and benevolence resulting in a helping hand which leads to the turning point of his life.

Horatio Alger’s works depict the young diligent protagonist together with the “American business culture” as a general concept. Alger conveys the message to his readers that to those who are ready to work hard, poverty is no obstacle. In addition to this, traditions and “social conventions” are to be respected and securing a place in the middle class segments of society is never just a dream for the individual who is diligent and willing to work in the right way. The ideology of rags-to-riches respectability turned Horatio Alger into one of the most influential writers among his contemporaries before he passed away in 1899.

The sales of Alger’s fictions reached its peak in 1910, when 1 million volumes were being sold each year. This success lasted until 1920 when his works began to lose its appeal. In 1926, most of his fiction was no longer published and by 1932 he was no longer remembered. Between the years of 1867 and 1920s, he was labeled as a popular author of “moral tales for young readers.” However, after the success in sales of his books came to an end, Alger’s works were transformed into a fundamentally different thing. Publishers were of the idea that the readers of Alger’s novels concentrated on the materialistic achievements of his works’ protagonists hence, ignoring the “moral lectures” of the narrator. Publishers abstained from the chapters which put forward the idea of “generosity and persistence.” They also refrained from printing any of his novels that conveyed the message that material achievement is of no use unless it is blended with middle-class respectability.

In the 1930s and 1940s although Alger's fiction was no longer published, many critics still saw Horatio Alger as an author who had advocated capitalism and who had adhered to the idea that any poverty-stricken boy living in the United States has the opportunity of becoming a remarkable success if he works hard with "patience and unwavering commitment."

Following the 1940s and throughout the next twenty years, Alger critics developed the "Alger Myth" by means of transforming Alger's humble and realist perspective of lower-class respectability into a materialistic dream by voicing the message that the business market of America provides its people with dazzling chances to achieve "material success" (Scharnhorst and Bales, 1985; 149- 151; Pitofsky, 1998; 277- 280; Kenner, 1974; 15).

Still maintaining his position as one of the world's most remarkable novelists, F. Scott Fitzgerald and his rags-to-riches story of Jay Gatsby presents the myth of the American dream from a very different perspective. Fitzgerald brings together contradictory concepts like money and love, dream and disappointment, the real and the ideal together with his critical perspectives concerning the Jazz Age society and the myth of the American dream itself, as it is supported by Callahan (1996; 374), "Fitzgerald embodied in his tissues and nervous system the fluid polarities of American experience: success and failure, illusion and disillusion, dream and nightmare."

Much of Fitzgerald's work was written under the influence of the Horatio Alger tales. However, unlike Alger's stories, the striving in most of Fitzgerald's stories is not related to respectability, getting acceptance from certain social circles or belonging to the middle-class segments of the society. Rather, they are more concerned with ways that would quickly fulfill the protagonist's dreams of abundance and wealth as Ronald Berman (2002; 80) explains in the following words, "the Horatio Alger stories about starting poor and ending rich were very much on

Fitzgerald's mind... one of [his] principle messages is that getting rich is easier than being accepted.''

Another notable novelist concerned with the issue of the self-formation myth is Sinclair Lewis. He, unlike Horatio Alger, neither told the usual rags-to-riches story, nor, like F. Scott Fitzgerald, focused on a single hero as the symbol of the American dream; rather, he was more concerned with societal improvement that could be fulfilled through individual hard work which would consequently contribute both to cultural development and personal growth, as it is supported by Glen A. Love (1973; 577), "The fundamental Lewis hero hopes thus, through the product of his creative endeavors- invention, building, town, city, medical discovery- to assert not only his own individuality but also his participation in the social order and his commitment to the shaping of the emerging new society.'"

Lewis was much under the influence of Emerson. He believed progress and improvement could be achieved in various ways. One of the most effective ways was the "reconciliation" of the city with nature by means of relating the city more closely to its natural environment which was also a theme in Emerson's writing too. At this stage, the most important duty would fall to the individual who worked in tune with the ideals and principles of the American dream. Just like Emerson, Lewis created an individual who would fulfill his destiny and his nation's fate by means of the reconciliation of city with nature as mentioned above. The goal being nature and culture reconciliation, the hero's path to realizing the dream proved to be the same as the goal itself. The situation is evident in Lewis's character, Dodsworth. Dodsworth is the ideal western character who develops the necessary technology to fulfill his goal of interweaving "cultural progress" with "nature.'"

Believing in the reconciliation of the real and the utopian, Lewis imagined ways for societal and cultural development. One of them was the reconciliation of the rural with the urban. The heroes of Lewis would cross the boundaries between an "agrarian past" to an "industrial future." This was to be done through positivism and science by the intellectually and individually enhanced hero. If the western

horizon was to be extended, this dream would be fulfilled by the native westerner who would make the best use of scientific tools he had to hand. As a consequence, the historical interplay between the myth and the garden would be transformed into a “progressive synthesis.” The situation is clearly exhibited in Lewis’ novel *Arrowsmith*. The laboratory of Martin Arrowsmith is a remarkable reflection of the related terms of “scientific progress, creative individualism and nature.”

Apart from Emerson, Lewis used Thoreau’s *Walden* as an influence and as a determiner to his novels. Nature in Lewis’ novels would prove to be a seclusion for the hero because he/she could better his/her condition and complete his/her personal growth there. The protagonist, Milquetoast, in *Our Mr. Wrenn* (1914) drifts toward “self-reliance” at the conclusion of his trip through the British natural environment. *The Innocents* written in 1917 depicts a couple’s noteworthy change from “shy nonentities into aggressive and successful go-getters” after taking a stroll in the countryside. *The Trail of the Hawk* (1915) and *Free Air* (1919) exhibit the transformation of “city girls”: Ruth Winslow, the heroine of *The Trail of the Hawk* and Claire Boltwood, the heroine of *Free Air*. In these novels, the clear change from “eastern (indoor)” to “western (outdoor)” type of women is successfully depicted through contact with nature.

Lewis’ most influential Thoreauvian traits are displayed through his character Martin Arrowsmith. Martin Arrowsmith’s rejection of society is presented as a seclusion that is ultimately Thoreauvian. Arrowsmith’s decisive choice of nature as a place of shelter and his strong aspirational nature justifies his idealist individualism. (Love, 1973; 563- 577)

Whether it is Horatio Alger who approaches the myth of the self-made man from a perspective that favors personal respect and intellectual enhancement or is Francis Scott Fitzgerald who transforms the myth by twisting its pristine ideals into materialistic desires and displays or Sinclair Lewis who takes the myth to a whole new level by adding Emersonian and Thoreauvian attitudes to its hero who aim at blending nature and science, the myth of the American dream has always been a

fruitful trigger in terms of providing the necessary guidance to American people. Literature, in the meantime, has been the most effective mean of imposing the myths ideals on its readers by means of varying viewpoints and perspectives depending on the needs and conditions of the nation's time and culture.

CHAPTER III

A COMPARISON OF NATURALISM AND THE AMERICAN DREAM: A CASE STUDY

3.1 EDITH WHARTON'S *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*

One finds that Mrs. Wharton has placed such heavy emphasis upon the molding influence of environment that it seems as if Lily would have had to possess almost superhuman strength in order to withstand it- Larry Rubin

Lily, in a word, is trapped. The idea of a lovely young woman, obviously meant for better things, completely hemmed in and cornered by the values and conventions of a frivolous society – Larry Rubin

3.1.1 Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton was a remarkable example of a naturalist writer with her naturalist depictions of the world and her potent descriptions of the circumstances an individual might face. Her choice of subjects for her novels and the milieu she chose her events to take place in are what elevated her to the place she still occupies in the American literary arena today.

The House of Mirth (1905) was Wharton's second novel and it brought her huge success. *Ethan Frame* was the novel that followed *The House of Mirth* in 1911. *The Custom of the Country* (1913), *Summer* (1917) and finally *The Age of Innocence* (1920) were the novels Wharton wrote in succession.

Wharton wrote short stories: "The Touchstone" (1900) and "Sanctuary" (1903). *The Valley of Decision* (1902) was her novel that had its plot set in the eighteenth century; and her work of nonfiction, *The Decoration of Houses*, was an interior design guide she co-authored in 1906.

Contradicting other writers, who mainly dealt with the poor within the society, Wharton dealt with the rich- the people living in glamour. This was because she was coming from a family of wealth. Her prominence in exhibiting the rich so well was because she was one of them as Larry Rubin explains in the following statement:

in *The House of Mirth* the reader finds [the rich people] to be legion. The social life of New York is recorded in this book with “an anthropologist’s thoroughness”. And street addresses, décor, and costume are noted with laboratory precision. (1957; 186)

A woman heroine was generally chosen in Wharton’s novels. Using the background of extremely well-off people, Wharton would present the story of a woman struggling with the taboos and social codes of society. The heroine was exhibited with an aim of achieving great wealth and her own aspirations. In Wharton’s novels, the defects and mistakes of the characters were overtly portrayed. Society, in her novels, was generally depicted with all its superficial understanding of who-does-what and who-says-what. This idea was also supported by Boynton:

These people are not interested in social institutions of any kind. They ignore the market place no more than the bench and the bar, the church and the school; and no more so (except for a chapter or two in *The Age of Innocence*) than the whole world of institutionalized art- the theater, the opera house, the art gallery, and the library. To be sure they dissent from the crowd at every turn, but that is because of their instinctive feeling, not so much that they themselves are right, as that the crowd is certain to be vulgarly wrong. They are full of refinements, and valiantly aware of the dictates of propriety which make them live in continual fear of each others’ faint disapproval, faintly but damningly expressed. (1923; 27-28)

Materialism was one of the core ideas Wharton used as a subject-matter in her novels. She dealt with the “relation between the personal, material and social” (Town, 1994; 45). Materialism as depicted in Wharton’s novels was one element which would render life relentless upon the individual and serve the inexorable laws of the universe. As Geismar points out, the “Stress on ‘determinism,’ ‘materialism,’ and a mechanistic universe present themselves as the basis of naturalistic genre” (1954; 4).

The concept of materialism had strong connections with social Darwinism. In her novel *The House of Mirth*, Spencer's phrase "survival of the fittest" is conveyed through Wharton's powerful characters whose power stem mainly from their wealth. Protagonist Lily Bart's struggle to become a wealthy woman through marrying a wealthy man is another important event that justifies the material necessities needed to be fit and survive.

The concept of materialism shows itself in human interactions in every walk of life as Dimock explains in the following quotation;

a mode of human conduct and human association, the marketplace is everywhere and nowhere, ubiquitous and invisible. Under its shadow even the most private affairs take on the essence of business transactions, for the realm of human relations is fully contained within an all-encompassing business ethic. (1985; 783)

Materialism, for Edith Wharton, was more than a concept in the concrete sense for it had taken its toll on human relations and affairs as well. Her depiction of the protagonists, usually from the high classes of society, her successful connection of materialism with naturalism and her remarkable portrayal of society are the most important characteristics of Wharton's novels. That's why she maintains a prominent place in the American literary arena even today.

The House of Mirth by Edith Wharton is considered to be of great significance because it is a novel which clearly depicts the basic elements of the naturalist movement. Through the protagonist, Lily Bart, and the events she encounters, Wharton touches upon the basic elements of naturalism such as the negative forces of environmental factors, the influence of social Darwinism upon the society, the ineffectiveness of volition and the unsatisfactory conclusions of ethical conduct. Hence, Lily Bart emerges as the naturalist character who "completely and typically the product of her heredity, environment and the historical moment... the protagonist of any recognized naturalistic novel" (Nevius, 1953; 57).

3. 1. 2 Historical Context

After the industrial revolution, with the rise of the bourgeoisie class, a huge gap appeared between the rich and the poor. This development marked the beginning of the Gilded Age. The Gilded Age took place between 1876 and 1901. Wharton's novel *The House of Mirth* which was written in 1905 is highly under the influence of the Gilded Age for it depicts the extremities between the wealthy and the poverty-stricken from the perspective of a young woman's psychology, dreams and aspirations. Apart from the protagonist's perspective of events, social Darwinism's effects of favoring the rich while letting the fall of the poor are overtly presented in the novel. This principle is applicable to all characters in the novel be they good or evil, man or woman- what counts is if they have money and power or not. The influence of social Darwinism in *The House of Mirth* could be attributed to the Gilded Age's reflection on the novel.

3.1.3 The Examination of *The House of Mirth*

3.1.3.1 Plot

The House of Mirth tells the story of a woman named Lily Bart whose family has lost its fortune when she was a little girl. Lily Bart was brought up within a family who thought that women should make use of their outlook and beauty so as to marry a wealthy husband. Lily joins circles that bear potentials of providing her with a wealthy husband. She gambles, she parties and she dresses up. Shortly after, she becomes indebted to Mr. Trenor because of her extravagant life style. When Judy Trenor learns this, she suspects Lily of having an affair with Mr. Trenor although Lily is innocent and Gus Trenor is the one to blame since he tricks Lily. Selden is the only man Lily falls in love with however, he does not measure up to her ideals of opulence and glamour. This is because Selden does not value money. He lives by his philosophy of the "republic of the spirit" which puts spirituality over money. Lily passes up various opportunities of marrying a wealthy man like Percy Gyrce and Simon Rosedale. Being aware of the impossibility of marrying Lily, Selden goes

abroad and Lily goes on a voyage with Bertha Dorset and with other people from her circle. On the ship, Bertha slanders Lily with committing adultery with her husband although she is the one committing adultery and using Lily as a distraction to her husband. Having lost her prominence, Lily's downfall starts. First, she gets disinherited by her uncle due to her bad reputation and gambling debts. Later, she works with people she once considered inferior and gets turned down by Simon Rosedale. Towards the end of the novel, she encounters Nettie, one of the working class women. Through her she learns that she should not give up and start from the beginning with Selden despite all the hardships she faces. This time, however, due to an overdose of sleeping pills she passes away.

3.1.3.2 Characterization and the Society

Lily Bart, the heroine of the novel, is a woman with aspirations of advancing in the social ladder by means of marrying a wealthy husband. Throughout the novel, she suffers from her oscillation of either to preserve her individualism by means of defying conventions or to abide by the rules of society. Lily is young, beautiful and diligent however, her greed in always wanting the best for herself and her indecisive attitude towards life take her from the heights of glamour to the depths of anguish and finally leads to her death.

Selden is the second important character central to the plot of the novel. Selden is the man Lily Bart is in love with however, he does not measure up to Lily's standards of grandeur and opulence. He is a man of strong individuality for he does not value money and he shows no sign or effort of getting accepted to the upper-class socialite. Selden believes in the republic of spirit rather than believing the power of money. He is noteworthy because of his strong ability of observing the corrupted social milieu Lily Bart is in.

Bertha Dorset is a representative of the decadent members of the Gilded Age society. She is manipulative and ungrateful toward the people around her. This is because she does not refrain from slandering Lily in spite of the sacrifices she makes

for the sake of their friendship. Bertha Dorset is well aware of the power that comes with money and she is very good at exploiting people through money.

Simon Rosedale is a representative of the men living in the Gilded Age. He believes that he can obtain anything with the power that comes with money- even women. Rosedale is self-oriented and he is diligent to obtain the highest spot in the upper-class social milieu by means of expanding his wealth invested in real estate.

Edith Wharton was a novelist who was highly critical of the social circle she was raised in. Wharton's disapproval of the ways and values of the upper class New York socialite is remarkably depicted in *The House of Mirth* through its characters and the events the characters go through. Singley explains this situation as such:

It is easy to understand the popularity of *The House of Mirth*. Edith Wharton had reached a middle-class audience eager for insights into glamorous upper-class life made all the more interesting by her willingness to expose society's flaws. (2003; 7)

One of the main things the writer is critical of is the treacherous people within New-York's society, especially women, plotting against each other and manipulating things to their own advantage. This is also stated by Ammons as such; "...women prey on each other – stealing reputations, opportunities, male admirers- all to parlay or retain status and financial security in a world arranged by men..." (1980; 27) Bertha Dorset is the best example of this with her opportunistic and selfish nature that does not consider others before her own interests, as discussed previously.

Not only women but also men undertake conduct that is utterly self-centered. Simon Rosedale is the strongest character in the novel that fits most into this definition. His selfish nature is solidified through the course of his changing attitude towards Lily Bart. At the beginning of the novel Rosedale appears to be a character that is overeager to marry Lily. However, after Lily loses her prominent place in the social circle they are a part of, a change of attitude emerges in Simon Rosedale. When Lily is ready to marry him, he turns her down and his reasons for rejecting Miss Bart prove Rosedale's emotions towards the protagonist as being rather

superficial. From Rosedale's dialogue with Lily Bart, one can infer that Lily, for Rosedale, has always been a figure he wanted to show off with. Yet, apart from her beauty, when the heroine loses the positive qualities Rosedale thinks he could display to others, he refrains from getting together with her. The following expressions serve as evidence to Simon Rosedale's interest-based, self-absorbed nature:

... I know the quickest way to queer yourself with the right people is to be seen with the wrong ones; and that's the reason I want to avoid mistakes... There it is, you see I'm more in love with you than ever, but if I married you now I'd queer myself for good and all, and everything I've worked for all these years would be wasted." "I understand you," she said. "A year ago I should have been of use to you, and now I should be an encumbrance; and I like you for telling me so quite honestly. (*House of Mirth*, 208- 209)

Selden is a male character that has his own defects. Firstly, he cannot fully commit for he is snobbish. He has a blurry morality and he combines both good and bad qualities within his character. At the top of his imperfections comes his assumption that he is more intelligent and important than others. He is sometimes contemptuous of the ways and the values of the people that surround him rather than being merely critical. Selden is too pleased with himself thus, he does not feel the obligation to make any changes with his life; avoiding any kind of interruptions from the outside that he thinks would spoil his feelings of comfort and satisfaction with himself. (Miller, 1987) That is the reason why he tries to get away from Lily when he thinks his love for her has become so deep that it poses a threat against his well-being. Miller explains this situation in the following quotation:

[S]elden is one of Wharton's flawed males. At the bottom of his personality there is a moral reticence, an inadequate capacity for commitment and belief that aligns him with other Wharton characters whom she indicts for living in a temperate zone of repressed feeling. He is, for example, appreciative of Lily's beauty and intrigued by her unsuspected depth, but he is also vain enough to trivialize her importance to him as merely "stimulating even to a man who had renounced sentimental experiments." His complacency and condescension are poised against his otherwise genuine good intentions, but these qualities are insistent signals to Wharton's audience that he is to be viewed in the light of sustained ironic ambivalence. (1987; 88)

As for the society in general, despite Lily Bart making many mistakes stemming from her state of oblivion to the dangerously self-absorbed people around

her, she is well aware of the shallowness of the circle she wants to be a part of, "... she saw that they were merely dull in a loud way, under the glitter of their opportunities she saw the poverty of their achievement" (*House of Mirth*, 49). On the surface, people around Lily seem to be living under great wealth and abundance however, if one digs a little deeper, it becomes obvious that what they had achieved is mere failure. Their failure is because of the life they lead aimlessly in corruption within the money-oriented world they have created for themselves. People around Lily lack anything that could be related to intellectuality. Even the library is used as a smoking area or a place serving only for the purposes of courtship, "the library at Bellamont was in fact never used for reading, though it had a certain popularity as smoking-room or a quiet retreat for flirtation" (52).

Lily is also aware of the shallow relationships that are based on one's appearance and activities that comply with social expectations. We see Lily Bart and, every other woman in the novel, gambling most of the time for the sole purpose of being accepted as part of the social circle she aspires to. When things turn out to be financially tight for Lily, she ceases to gamble. Moreover, she becomes financially unable to wear the expensive clothes she used to wear. This phase she goes through, seriously ruins her relationships with the people she believes to be "friends." This situation is evident in one of the heroine's closest friends, Judy Trenor, who starts to change her attitude towards the protagonist when Lily runs out of financial resources as Lily points out, "I have had to give up Doucet and bridge too- I can't afford any of the things my friends do, and I am afraid Judy often thinks me a bore because I don't play cards any longer, and because I am not as smartly dressed as the other women" (73).

3.1.3.3 The symbol of Money and Gambling

Throughout the novel, Lily Bart gambles with the sole purpose of becoming a part of the social circle she aspires to get into. However, deep down gambling bears deeper meanings. Lily does not gamble so as to win money, she gambles because she wants to get the best in life. She gambles with the man she will marry by rejecting

every single potential husband candidates she encounters, she gambles with friendship through seeing the lower-class women as too inferior to become her friends which is one of the biggest mistakes she makes because the ones she considers as inferior turns out to be her best friends as Nettie and the ones she considers to be her real friends turns out to be hypocrites who use Lily to their own advantage- just like Bertha. At the end of the novel, Lily gambles with her own existence by means of taking an overdose of sleeping pills which lead to her death despite the fact that she had been warned against the pills.

3.1.3.4 The Novel of Manners

The novel of manners first appeared with Romanticism mainly in England during the nineteenth century. In England, the novel of manners was influential in the Works of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen while in American Literature, Hannah Foster, Catherine Maria Sedgwick and Kate Chopin were notable figures in the novel of manners. There are three main elements that constitute the novel of manners: firstly, a single woman heroine is needed. Secondly, classes designate the man the single protagonist will marry and for the last, the ending should include either the happiness of the heroine through marriage or the death of the heroine. All three factors are applicable to Lily Bart: She is a single woman seeking marriage with a wealthy husband from the upper segments of society and her ending is marked by death from an overdose of sleeping pills which put *The House of Mirth* under the rubric of the most influential works of the novel of manners and mark Edith Wharton as one of the most remarkable writers who contributed to the novel of manners.

3.1.4 Naturalism in *The House of Mirth*

3.1.4.1 The Concept of Existence

Throughout the novel, there exists a chain of events which appears to be working independent of Lily and against any advantages Lily may have. Every single opportunity for the protagonist not only slips through her fingers but also damages

her own being in various aspects, getting progressively worse and serving to the novel's naturalistic character. As the novel develops, the predetermined, unlucky events never cease, rather they continue in a chain of negative developments ultimately leading to her death, a theory supported by Elaine Showalter,

[W]hereas the heroine of women's fiction triumphs in every crisis confounds her enemies and wins over curmudgeons and reforms rakes, Lily is continually defeated. The aunt who should come to her rescue disinherits her; Bertha Dorset, the woman friend who should have faith in her cannot trust her long enough to overcome her own emotional fastidiousness. With stark fatalism rather than with the optimism of woman's fiction Wharton takes Lily from the heights to her death. (1985; 138)

When Lily Bart encounters Nettie, and when she gets the opportunity to see and experience a true family life through her, our protagonist reaches a very important conclusion and understanding concerning both a man's and a woman's duties towards each other. The heroine mainly comes to grips with what love requires from the ones that have tasted it, "... it had taken two to build the nest; the man's faith and the woman's courage" (*House of Mirth*, 280). From this realization, Wharton makes the reader expect from Lily Bart a new perspective on life, a new leaf to turn over and for her to start from scratch.

Tomorrow would not be so difficult after all: she felt sure that she would have the strength to meet it she did not quite remember what it was that she had been afraid to meet, but the uncertainty no longer troubled her. She had been unhappy, and now she was happy- she had felt herself alone, and now the sense of loneliness had vanished. (283)

This new beginning is reinforced by the vision of Nettie Struther's child the protagonist sees before falling asleep, "she stirred once, and turned on herself, and as she did so, she suddenly understood why she did not feel herself alone. It was odd- but Nettie Struther's child was lying on her arm" (283). However, the deterministic factors once again take their toll on the protagonist no matter how enthusiastic she appears about her future and hold her back from the new beginning she wishes to have for herself through her untimely death.

Social Darwinism's notion of the survival of the fittest has a great influence on *The House of Mirth*. Throughout the novel, the ones in possession of wealth and power are depicted as the real "survivors" be they good or evil. Men, particularly, have the highest spot of power for they are the ones who earn and control it. According to Merish, "the market in *The House of Mirth* is an inescapable, controlling environment, a subterranean network which organizes the text's relations of visibility and which is largely controlled by men" (1996; 325). Dimock also agrees with the idea of Merish and states that "power in *The House of Mirth*, many critics have suggested, is patriarchal. They are right, no doubt, about the basis for power, insofar as money making is a male prerogative..." (1985; 784). This situation is incarnated in the portrayal of the powerful men like Simon Rosedale and Gus Trenor who appear to be the controllers of the market thus, relations in general. First, Gus Trenor derives the courage from his money to make advances towards Lily Bart. Later, Simon Rosedale tries to affect and control the emotions of Lily through showing her how he would endow his wealth on the woman who would be his wife.

Women also appear to be in a competition to marry a wealthy husband so as to become fit enough to survive. Throughout the novel, they make use of their beauty so as to attain power through marrying a rich man as suggested by Singley;

Wharton is particularly sensitive to the role of gender in shaping characters' options. She indicts an early twentieth-century social system that requires women to marry for money, rendering them little more than decorative objects, and she dramatizes the plights of both men and women as they scramble to position themselves socially during a time of tremendous cultural change. (2003; 4)

There are many statements in the novel that lead its reader to this conclusion. Initially, because Lily Bart is brought up with such a perspective she also cannot help the situation. When her father goes bankrupt, and when her family loses everything they used to have, Lily's mother's only piece of advice is that she will win back the wealth and abundance they used to have through Lily's beauty, "but you'll get it all back – you'll get it all back with your face" (*House of Mirth*, 25). Obviously, women in *The House of Mirth* are presented as beings living merely to sell themselves as women "represented as marriage commodities who sell themselves to the highest

bidder in their attempt to move up the American dream's socioeconomic ladder'' (Tyson, 1994; 17).

Another important example emphasizing the identification of women with commodities is the *tableaux vivants*. As for a definition, the *tableaux vivants* means silent persons representing the popular works of art and remarkable happenings from the past. Contrary to this definition, the *tableaux vivants* in *The House of Mirth* merely serves to the reinforcement of women as sexual objects mainly to feed the desires of men. According to Chapman '‘the women in *The House of Mirth* serve as erotic emblems of passivity and submission for male audiences’’ (1996; 32). When Lily appears on stage, Selden only fully becomes aware of this situation through the comments and cheers made by the male spectators;

[W]henever the parting of the curtains presented any exceptional opportunity for the study of the female outline, affected their hearer in an unexpected way. It was not the first time Selden had heard Lily's beauty lightly remarked on, and hitherto the tone of the comments had imperceptibly coloured his view of her. But now it woke only a motion of indignant contempt. This was the world she lived in; these were the standards by which she was fated to be measured! (*House of Mirth*, 119)

Just like commodities, women in *The House of Mirth* are expected to maintain their beauty and outlook so as to attract the attention of wealthy men. The importance given to one's appearance in *The House of Mirth* is indisputable. Lily always feels the obligation to dress up and be as presentable as she can. It is clear that the value given to an individual and the attention one receives from the outside is highly dependent on what one wears and this is the reason why the protagonist, Lily, spends so much money on '‘smart clothes’’ even during the times when she is tackling the problem of finding money. Lily knows that if she wants to be accepted by her social circle she has to live that way. As a result, in an environment where money speaks and where the ones who have the money are considered to be strong, any kind of material display is acceptable because it contributes to a woman's possibility of marrying a wealthy husband. In short, it contributes to a woman's '‘fitness’’ to '‘survive’’ as is clear from the following expression by the heroine;

If I were shabby no one would have me: a woman is asked as much for her clothes as for herself. The clothes are the background, the frame, if you like: they don't make success, but they are a part of it. Who wants a dingy woman? We are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership. (11)

Bertha Dorset is the strongest female character in the novel who conspicuously justifies the social Darwinian ideal of the survival of the fittest. When Lily gets thrown off *Sabrina*, everybody on the ship knows that Lily Bart is innocent and used by Bertha Dorset as a diversion for her husband. Moreover, they also know that the one that should be punished is Bertha Dorset however; nobody does anything against Bertha for she is the powerful, wealthy one. Hence, Bertha finds the right within herself to manipulate others. Wharton describes Bertha's effect on others as follows, "that influence... was simply the power of money: Bertha Dorset's social credit was based on an impregnable Bank-account" (228). Lily is aware of the reasons why everyone favors Bertha Dorset while turning their back on her, "it's a great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset's story than mine, because she has a big house and an opera box, and it's convenient to be on good terms with her"(197). The statement above proves how strong the influence of money is on one's social milieu and justifies the ideal of the survival of the fittest once again.

In an atmosphere where women are in rivalry to outdo each other, men also strive to make the best woman their wife so as to justify their fitness not only in terms of their money making capacities but also their masculinity. Thus, Simon Rosedale tries to win Lily Bart, the best of all women in their social milieu, and justify his fitness as a male. However, this situation does not present a picture of true love and affection, instead, Lily for Simon Rosedale, is simply a commodity to display and to show off by endowing her beauty with material things. We understand this by the implications he makes towards Lily, "... the money doesn't seem to have of any account unless I can spend it on the right woman: that's what I want to do with it: I want my wife to make all other women feel small, I'd never grudge a dollar that was spent on that" (155). As it is clear, if Lily becomes the wife of Simon Rosedale, she will not be a wife that is loved and genuinely cared for. Rather, she

will become one of the invaluable objects which will justify Rosedale's wealth and masculinity to others serving to celebrate his fitness to survive once again.

It is pretty obvious that throughout the book, there appears various ways of payback that justify women's position as a commodity and men's powerful position to be able to ask for things from women. If the exchange is to take place between a man and a woman and if the woman is expected to be the one to make the payment, this payment changes its form and transforms from "money" to "body". From Gus Trenor's implications, we understand that he simply is not after money in return for what he has gifted to Lily. What Gus Trenor wishes to have is Lily herself. Dimock supports this idea by saying that, "money, the standard medium of exchange, is not the only currency in circulation." He argues that, "Trenor clearly does not wish to be paid back with a check" and summarizes the situation in the novel as the "commodification of social intercourse" meaning, that he accepts any intimate intercourse with the protagonist which he sees as an equivalent in return for the money that he has given to her. (1985; 783-784). Lily's position as a commodity is solidified with the dialogue she has with Gus Trenor based on this exchange in the below given quotation;

[Y]ou got reckless- thought you could turn me inside out and chuck me in the gutter like an empty purse. But, by gad, that ain't playing fair: that's dodging the rules of the game. Of course I know what you wanted- it wasn't my beautiful eyes you were after- but I tell you what Miss Lily, you've got to pay up for making me think so" "Pay up?" She faltered. "Do you mean that I owe you money?" He laughed again. "Oh, I'm not asking for payment in kind. But there's such a thing as fair play- and interest on one's money- and hang me if I've had as much as a look from you-" (*House of Mirth*, 89)

Selden is the weakest male character in the novel as he is the only man who is not fit enough to ask things from Lily for he lacks wealth. This situation renders him unable to measure up to the standards of Lily and it metaphorically declares the fact that Selden is unable to be a survivor compared to other men in the novel who are fit enough to afford the women that they wish to have.

Towards the end of the novel, Lily Bart becomes increasingly short of the money. Thus, we see the negatively developing negative effect on her psychology for lacking money means lacking friends, grandeur and most importantly aspirations. This situation takes its toll on Lily and late in the novel, she starts taking sleeping pills for the sake of escaping the state she is in which leads to her death. All these events show how materialistic motives and desires could negatively affect one's psychology. For Reus and Usandiza, "Wharton's Manhattan and the deeply congested space of New York function to highlight the destructive impact of consumerism upon civic life and the individual female psyche" (2008; 109). As a result, this ending highlights and justifies once again the ideal of the survival of the fittest for Lily's untimely death serves as a deserved ramification because of her inability of being fit enough to support herself materialistically in a money-oriented world.

3.1.4.2 The Concept of Self

Throughout the novel, Lily Bart suffers from the problem of being unable to live by her own free will. The novel develops through a chain of events that collectively work against the choices and decisions made by the protagonist. *The House of Mirth* is constituted through "imagery of a pessimistic environmental determinism of man as not merely related to or independent on his social setting but as destructively imprisoned by it" (Pizer, 1995; 242). None of the choices made by Lily's own free will becomes a reality due to the environmental deterministic factors. She neither fulfills her dream of marrying a wealthy man nor can she attain individual freedom of what Selden calls "republic of spirit." Throughout the novel, the reader encounters merely strife and struggle with no tangible outcomes as the protagonist states in the below given quotation;

I have tried hard – but life is difficult, and I am a very useless person. I can hardly be said to have an independent existence. I was just a screw or a cog in the great machine called life, and when I dropped out of it I found I was of no use anywhere else" (*House of Mirth*, 270).

This statement of the heroine proves that her individuality depends greatly on the factors functioning independently from her own will.

The depiction Carol Miller touches upon is quite notable for it is a good representation of the suffocation and the psychological entrapment Lily Bart goes through due to her inability to use her individual free will;

Lily perceives that she is caught in the “great gilt cage” Selden can somehow escape at will: “how alluring the world outside the cage appeared to Lily as she heard its door clang shut on her! In reality, as she knew, the door never clanged: it stood always open; but most of the captives were like flies in a bottle, and having once flown in, could never regain their freedom” the simile suggesting entrapment and the loss of free will, is classically naturalistic, and it also shrewdly combines for ironic effect images of suffocation and flight- both image traditionally significant... (1987; 87)

As the novel develops, this situation psychologically takes its toll on the heroine and the protagonist’s incapability of living by her own free will ultimately result in an identity problem. Lily cannot be truly herself in her relations with other people because she always feels the need to behave in a certain way that pleases others she depends on. Consequently, the protagonist sees herself as the entertainer of others, failing to live for herself and succumbing once again to the mechanistic laws of the universe which force her to be an object of entertainment for the ones she relies on and rendering her unable to live by her own free will, “... [W]hen she ceased to amuse Judy Trenor and her friends she would have to fall back on amusing Mrs. Peniston: whichever way she looked she saw only a future of servitude to the whims of others, never the possibility of asserting her own eager individuality” (162) Hence, Lily emerges as being worn away by the state she is in. She suffers from being an incapable independent individual resulting in feeling something other than human, “she was weary of being swept passively along a current of pleasure and business in which she had no share; weary of seeing people pursue amusement... She felt herself of no more account among them than an expensive toy in the hands of a spoiled child” (211). It is clear, it would not be wrong to say that Lily Bart is completely oblivious to the deterministic environment that surrounds her hopelessly.

Because “... unlike many contemporary naturalistic protagonists, [Lily] is fully aware of her condition as one bound by her social matrix” (Pizer, 1995; 242).

Throughout the novel, the heroine, Lily Bart, suffers from a personal dilemma within herself. This dilemma is because of the wide gap between her own genuine wishes for personal freedom and the societal roles imposed upon her or the clash between determinism and free will. Since “[T]he novel’s central didactic is the resulting tension between individuality and convention, and its conflicts illustrate the fateful consequences to individualism imposed by the narrow structures of an even narrower social group” (Miller, 1986; 86).

As for individual freedom, Lily Bart is very much under the influence of Selden and his “republic of spirit” for it appeals to the individualism of the heroine; “Lily admires Selden’s ability to express his critical insights on the world she inhabits and envies his freedom to do so. She believes Selden speaks to that side of her character that values the possibilities of self-realization” (Pennel, 2003; 186).

Selden appears as one of the characters who differ from Lily’s social circle in some respect. Although he is not completely different from the other people that surround Lily, he is a character which seems to be living a life less dependent on money. Selden believes in a “republic of spirit” which comes to mean individual freedom from everything that is related to money and materialistic desires. He tries to overcome the societal roles which try to imprison everyone and thus, render everybody the same. He appears as the only free-spirited character in the novel. The following statement of Selden supports this idea; “freedom from everything- from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents to keep a kind of republic of the spirit- that’s what I call success” (*House of Mirth*, 60). Selden is the only character who does not consider money as a stepping stone on the path to success. We understand this from his response to Lily with regard to her belief in associating success with a wealthy marriage; “... you will marry someone rich and It’s as hard for rich people to get into the kingdom of heaven” (61).

No matter how materialistic Lily seems, there are many parts in the novel which suggests a resemblance to Selden's point of view which defies materialism, "she would not indeed have cared to marry a man who was merely rich: she was secretly ashamed of her mother's crude passion for money" (31). A part of Lily distinguishes her from the other people who are living in a money-oriented way. Selden's influence upon Lily and Lily's resemblance to Selden are apparent in Lily's conduct as well. Many times in the novel, when Lily has a chance to marry a wealthy man, she somehow refrains from the chance, "she might have married more than once – the conventional rich marriage which she had been taught to consider the sole end of existence- but when the opportunity came she had always shrunk from it" (137).

All of these events serve as evidence to Lily's endeavor to defy conventions also functioning as a proof to her struggle of acquiring a life standard that measures up to her side of individual liberty. "[A]lthough Lily wants to marry with a wealthy man to keep her social status, she still tries to remain true to herself" (Li-xia, 2007; 61). As Lily spends more time with Selden, she realizes the oppressive environment she was brought up in- the social conditions and conventions that have entrapped her in every walk of life. Spending more time with Selden, Lily becomes more aware of the oppressive milieu she is in and grows further attracted to the republic of spirit and its meaning of individual liberty from all kinds of restrictions. Moreover, she understands the shallowness of the people around her that live under the oppressive ways they have created and regrets discovering the republic of the spirit so late, "... perhaps it's rather that I never had any choice. There was no one, I mean, to tell me about the republic of spirit" (60).

The other side of Lily causing the dilemma within her is her obsession with money and her ambition to achieve her aspirations. Lily dreams of becoming one of those women who hold the power money brings within herself. She even aspires to become better than them through her exhibition of possessions that would prove her fitness to other survivors;

She would have smarter gowns than Judy Trenor, and far, far more jewels than Bertha Dorset. She would be free for ever from the shifts, the expedients, the humiliations of the relatively poor. Instead of having to flatter, she would be flattered; instead of being grateful, she would receive thanks... she had no doubts as to the extent of her power. (43)

Lily Bart cannot help her materialistic side causing the strong duality within herself. Lily loves money and the things that come with money which are beauty, power and adventure as she states, "I want admiration, I want excitement, I want, money! That's my shame" (47).

The clash between spiritual liberty and materialistic entrapment within the soul of the protagonist is solidified in real life by her deliberations as to whether to marry Selden, symbolizing spiritualism and individualism, or Percy Gryce, symbolizing materialism and convention. Lily can never fully be herself except when she is with Selden. However, because of external influences on her and the money-oriented way she was brought up, she does not consider Selden as the appropriate husband for herself. Thus, at the beginning of the novel we see the heroine taking the role of the potential wife of Percy Gryce who complies with the way she was brought up. Lily never falls in love with Mr. Gryce. What she is after is his fortune. Edith Wharton makes Lily's money-based intentions crystal clear by Lily's retort when she learns that Percy Gryce is going to get married to Evie Van Osburgh, "... why should Percy Gryce's millions be joined to another great fortune? Why should this clumsy girl be put in possession of powers she would never know how to use?" (81). However, because of the fact that it is not a decision made by the protagonist's own free will, Lily suffers from the problem of not being herself again.

...the difficulty of representing one personality while remaining another can be easily applied to Lily's problem... When the novel begins, Lily thinks she can become Mrs. Percy Gryce without ceasing to be herself but in the course of her experience she encounters the difficulty... of this particular balancing act. (Hochman, 1995; 221)

This statement of Hochman makes clear how much Lily struggles within herself between either fighting or yielding to the forces outside her which oppress her with the demands they place upon her. These results in the heroine having a serious

dilemma whether to remain true to herself or become what the people around her expect her to be.

Lily loves money but at the same time she longs to be free from the imprisoning affect of it. She wants to marry a wealthy man, but she refrains from getting married to someone for the sole purpose of money because of the fact that it is against her side that whispers individual liberty. However, she also withdraws from any involvement with Selden for that is against the conventional ways she is raised. All these factors show how strong the dilemma Lily suffers within herself is and show how strong the clash between individual free will and outside pressures are.

As it is one of the characteristics of naturalism, Lily Bart's ethical conducts does not grant her what she truly deserves in return. She endeavors in every respect to be one of Bertha Dorset's closest friends but her struggle not only results in her being thrown off *Sabrina* but also her becoming an outcast. Moreover, this situation leads to her being disinherited by her aunt. Later, despite the fact that she gets the opportunity to destroy Bertha Dorset by the letters addressed to Selden by Bertha, she does not use them against her for she thinks this act of hers would also ruin the reputation of Selden as well. However, this ethical conduct of Lily neither brings Selden back to her nor makes her win back the prominent reputation she used to have. This idea is supported by Larry Rubin as such; "Lily Bart possesses a set of ethical principles somewhat loftier than those displayed by most of her fellow-hedonists in this elegant society; and it is part of the irony of the book that the practice of these higher standards is what ultimately brings about her ruin" (1957; 183). When society finds Bertha Dorset more credible than Lily Bart, Lily emerges as the one with the most losses. Thus, Bertha Dorset does not receive any kind of punishment either for her decadent affair with Ned Silverton or for her spoiled behavior against anyone she dislikes. Nor does Lily, the one with the best of intentions, receive the kind of ending one expects to receive for someone with ethical choices. Dimock puts it as follows; "... if the logic of exchange were to be faithfully followed, [Bertha Dorset] ought to have paid a heavy price for her affair with Ned

Silverton. But Bertha, in her ‘cold determination to escape [the] consequences’ of her actions, has raised nonpayment to an art’’ (1985; 785).

3.2 F. SCOTT FITZGERALD’S *THE GREAT GATSBY*

There is doubtless no more perfect piece of Americana in all of literature. Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches, the American Dream, upward mobility: it is all there. Fitzgerald has grasped the enormity of the American cliché, the self-made man... - Arnold Weinstein

3.2.1 F. Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Fitzgerald was born in September 24, 1896. He was the author of many literary masterpieces that are still influential even in today’s American literary arena. His career started with his novel, *This Side of Paradise* which was written in 1920. His following novels included *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), *Tender is the Night* (1934) and *The Lost Tycoon* (1942). Some of Fitzgerald’s influential short stories are: “The Ice Palace” which he wrote in 1920; “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” (1921) and “Winter Dreams” (1922). The writer’s other works include a play, *The Vegetable, or from President to Postman* written in 1923 and an essay, *The Crack-Up* which he wrote in 1945.

F. Scott Fitzgerald had serious problems with alcohol. He was a very hard drinking person and most people believe his death was related to alcohol abuse. “[A]lcohol contributed to his death. Critics note his repeated displays of the alcoholic’s cardinal traits: denial and self-deception, a tendency toward violence when drunk... some of Fitzgerald’s best fiction depicts alcoholic characters revealing if with deceptive unobtrusiveness’’(Gale, 1998; 5). The Crack-Up is particularly important in terms of understanding Fitzgerald’s issues with alcohol for he, “writes more directly about alcoholism in [it]’’ (1998; 5).

Another influence on Fitzgerald's novels and characters was Zelda Fitzgerald, the writer's beloved wife. Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald was a popular couple in the eyes of the American public. To many people, their unstable relationship was a subject of interest. Zelda's influence on Fitzgerald's career is most conspicuous in Fitzgerald's character Daisy Buchanan for Daisy and Zelda resemble each other in many ways. Apart from the similarities between the two women, there exist many other similarities between the plot of Fitzgerald's masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* and the romantic real life story of Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

As a poor student, Fitzgerald dropped out of Princeton University and decided to join the US army during World War I. However, right after he enlisted, the war was over. Later, Fitzgerald met Zelda, the daughter of an Alabama Supreme Court judge, at the camp. Zelda and Fitzgerald immediately fell in love and got engaged in 1919 Curnutt explains what Zelda meant to F. Scott Fitzgerald as such; "Zelda was the perfect girl for young Scott: beautiful, independent, brilliant in conversation, and correspondence, socially prominent...Fitzgerald was not only attracted to her considerable charms but also to her status as the most popular girl" (2007; 17). Zelda was just like the 'king's daughter,' the 'golden girl' (120), Daisy Buchanan.

Similar to Daisy's abandonment of Gatsby because of financial concerns, Zelda broke off their engagement for fear of leading a financially difficult life, as Curnutt puts it, "despite their grandiloquent romance, Zelda was wary of marrying a man whose military pay totaled \$ 141 a month" (2007; 17).

The experiences Fitzgerald went through with Zelda were not the only influences on his writing. During the time of their relationship, Fitzgerald made good use of Zelda's certain personal letters and diaries by copying some parts of them to his works. As a result, Zelda Fitzgerald played an important part in F. Scott Fitzgerald's life and career not only as a lover but also as an inspiration.

Considering his groundbreaking romance and marriage with Zelda coupled with his marginal lifestyle and the important part he played among the Lost Generation writers, it comes as little surprise that F. Scott Fitzgerald has been a prominent figure in American literature and a topic of wonder to the American public for generations.

3.2.2 Historical Context: America in the 1920s and the Lost Generation

The 1920s was marked by a great cultural transformation and this transformation took place mainly due to World War I, which brought about significant changes to the values of Americans. One of the most fundamental changes was the replacement of traditional values of cultural progress with materialism. Mass culture, extravagance, and consumerism were other elements that contributed to the changes the American society underwent. Nathan Miller defines the decade as such;

World War I was the great turning point of modern history. Over 15 million lives were lost in the struggle, including those of about 130,000 Americans. The universal presumptions of the Victorian age – progress, order and culture were blown to bits. For those who had endured the savagery of the fighting and those who lost husbands, fathers, brothers, lovers, and friends, life would never be the same again. The war ushered in a world of violent change that produced the leviathan state, consumerism, mass culture and mass communications, and the global economy- an era in which America would be supreme. (2004; 16)

In the aftermath of the war, people soon became indifferent to its tragic effects and started to lead a life focused on joy and fun as Fitzgerald puts it, “a whole race going hedonistic, deciding on pleasure” (1945; 6). Implying its decadence, Fitzgerald goes on explaining the phase America went through;

[T]he wildest of all generations, the generation which had been adolescent during the confusion of the war, brusquely shouldered my contemporaries out of the way and danced into the limelight. This was the generation whose girls dramatized themselves as flappers, the generation that corrupted its elders and eventually overreacted itself less through lack of morals than through lack of taste. May one offer in exhibit the year 1922! (1945; 6)

According to Ludlow “the twenties have been dubbed the ‘Jazz Age’ for which F. Scott Fitzgerald is conceded to have been the spokesman” (1946; 228). The Jazz Age started with the end of World War I, continued through the Roaring twenties and came to an end with the Great Depression. The period was basically related to things concerning pleasure and delight. The word jazz, “... has meant first sex, then dancing, then music. It is associated with a state of nervous stimulation...” (Fitzgerald, 1945; 6) It was a time when the American society underwent great transformation. This transformation mainly meant rejecting the older forms of living and recreating new standards of pleasure and entertainment as it is highlighted by Stein; “Americans discarded traditions and rewrote old rules. Novelist F. Scott said of the 1920s, the parties were bigger... the pace was faster... the morals were looser and the liquor was cheaper” (1994; 3)

But there was more to the Jazz Age than only amusement and decadence. The tendency toward entertainment was a reaction to the World War I’s pessimistic effects. “[T]he Jazz Age [was] a period whose gaiety and exuberance have been defined against the dark background of world war and depression.” (Gilbert 1977; 550). Moreover, it was a time when values were turned upside down. Being a decent person did not count because swindlers and those dealing with underground activities were common and popular. It was the time when women rebelled by bidding farewell to their centuries-long submissiveness and their roles as decent housewives and mothers. Ludlow sums these changes up in the following words; “it was the period of reaction from war, the day of the bootlegger and gangster, of women’s smoking, of the revolt against restraint” (1946; 228).

As well as the changes in social and cultural perspectives, the changes in intellectual arena of the 1920s were also of great importance. The decade manifested itself by a group of writers who had bohemian styles of living and who wrote with viewpoints differing from their contemporaries in many ways. These intellectuals were known as the Lost Generation and consisted of writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Ezra Pound and Waldo Peirce.

Malcolm Cowley offers an explanation of how and why this movement came about in the following words;

All of them were shaken loose from the moorings by the First World War, even if they were too young to serve in the army. All were given a new perspective on their native backgrounds. All traveled widely during the years when travel was cheap. All began writing at a time when it was easy for new men to be published even to earn a living from their books. Gertrude Stein said to Hemingway, “you are all a lost generation,” and there was truth in her remark, so long as it was taken in a moral sense: these writers had no home except in the past, no fixed standards, and in many cases, no sense of direction. (1944; 57)

Throughout their careers, the Lost Generation writers were in constant conflict with the social and political events taking place around them. They criticized events taking place in the world, although, they never actually turned this criticism into any form of active rebellion as Cowley puts it in the following quotation; “they are... rebellious but not revolutionary, progressively disillusioned, and passive rather than active in their mood” (1944; 61).

The novelists of the inter-war generation were rebels even before they graduated from high school. At first they rebelled against the hypocrisy of their elders and against the gentility of American letters. Next they rebelled against the noble phrases that justified the slaughter of millions in the First World War (although not one of them was in any real sense a pacifist). They rebelled against the philistinism and the scramble for money of the Harding days, just as they would later rebel against the illogic of the depression. They formed a persistent opposition, a minority never in power and never even organized. (Cowley, 1944; 61)

Having lived a large part of their lives abroad, mainly in Paris with all its immorality, the writers of the Lost Generation were highly acclaimed and praised because of their gifted ways of writing; “they [were] international in their interest, technically expert, lyrical rather than naturalistic” (Cowley, 1944; 58). Wallace Stegner further expands on their artistic qualities and attitudes as such;

Their bias was definably artistic, modern and bohemian; their method was predominantly flippant, irreverent, and satirical; their state of mind was rebellious against bourgeois culture, impatient of tradition or restraint, often anti-intellectual. They were emancipated. Their spokesmen par excellence were Hemingway and Fitzgerald.... Considered by its elders to be going morally to the dogs, this generation tended to be loose in its morals,

irresponsible politically and socially, but surprisingly devoted to high artistic ends. (1949; 183)

Their writing style was peculiar to them. They abstained from all kinds of details and they refrained from coming straight to the point. Instead, they preferred their readers to interpret the message they implicitly conveyed. They avoided any unnecessary details. Adjectives were omitted as much as possible. In addition to their direct style, metaphors were widely used in the writers' works. Furthermore, their texts lacked moral comments concerning the characters. Explanations, in general, were omitted, implications were dominant. Subjective conclusions were expected to be drawn by the readers. The method they used was fairly effective since the content would always envelop the reader. Their works were "symbolic," "behavioristic" and most importantly "lyrical." The impact on the readers was ultimately moving. This methodology is evident in Hemingway with his preoccupation with loneliness and death. Furthermore, Fitzgerald's depiction of the glamorous Jazz Age with its tragic effect upon the individual is another important example as is *U.S.A* by Dos Passos (Cowley, 1944; 60)

The bohemian writers of the 1920s were disappointed in various ways. They appeared to be skeptical about the world and about the 1920s American society. They sought ways of overcoming these feelings, although, in the end, their journey through life led them into a strong sense of worthlessness and pessimism toward everything that surrounded them (Cowley, 1944). Cowley explains their stages of disillusionment as such;

It first took the form of lost faith in the possibility of leading a good life- and of writing good books- in isolation or exile. For ten years most of these novelists had been running away from American society, but they ended by the uselessness of flight. A second disillusionment was with the radical doctrines that many of them adopted after they stopped believing in art for art's sake. A third disillusionment was with life itself; at least this seems to be the burden of Hemingway's story, *A Clean, Well Lighted Place*. It ends on a note of absolute nihilism that seems to me more extreme and, in a way, more terrifying than anything written in pre- Revolutionary Russia: "Our nada who art in nada, nada by thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada as it is in nada... Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee." (1944; 61)

3.2.3 An Examination of *The Great Gatsby*

3.2.3.1 Plot

The Great Gatsby tells the story of a young boy named Jay Gatsby. In his youth, Gatsby falls in love with a girl named Daisy who is, unlike the protagonist, not after love but marriage of convenience depending on money. Gatsby enlists in the army and Daisy, breaks up with Gatsby and gets married to wealthy Tom Buchanan. Never been able to forget Daisy, Gatsby decides to win back her. He knows that the only way of winning Daisy back is building up great wealth. Consequently, Gatsby gets involved with immigrants who are dealing with bootlegging. Soon, Gatsby fulfills his dream of great wealth. Shortly after, Gatsby and Daisy meet again through Nick, Daisy's cousin. For a short period of time, Daisy seems to be impressed by Gatsby's fortune. Believing to reunite with Daisy, Gatsby makes all kinds of sacrifices he has at hand from throwing lavish parties to impressing her by the extravagant display of the possessions he owns. At the end of the novel, Gatsby take on the murder of Thom's mistress's death so as to protect Daisy from the crime she has committed. However, Gatsby, in the end, not only loses Daisy for she runs away with her husband but also he loses his life because he falls victim to Tom's sordid plans of manipulating Mr. Wilson into killing Gatsby.

3.2.3.2 Characterization and the Society

Jay Gatsby is a character of ambition whose ideals take him to the depths of poverty to the heights of wealth. Gatsby possesses some of the must-have qualities of the self-made hero of the American dream: he is idealistic, optimistic and ambitious. However, Gatsby possesses corrupted ideals as well and they serve to the disintegration of the American dream. Gatsby is a very important figure in the American literary arena because it is Fitzgerald's figure that serves to convey the message that the American dream is corrupted by means of the false set of ideals the society of the 1920s adopted. Gatsby is also presented as a man of love who is ready to do whatever it takes to win back the woman he loves. He is very giving and

altruistic. Hence, Gatsby appears as an ambivalent character bearing both the positive and the negative qualities and this is why he is one of the most influential heroes of the American literary arena.

Daisy Buchanan, the woman Gatsby is in love with is presented as the 1920s' women who worshipped money and opulence. Her character bears characteristics of the decadent, self-oriented and corrupted people living in the East egg during the 1920s. Moreover, Daisy is an incarnation of Zelda Fitzgerald who was also a money lover and who had left Scott Fitzgerald for fear of living a life in poverty. Daisy lacks individuality for her decisions are all made under the influence of money. She is very selfish because she leaves Gatsby for a richer man and she is ungrateful for she does not bother to attend Gatsby's funeral despite he is the one who sacrificed himself so as to save her from the crime that she had committed.

Tom Buchanan, the husband of Daisy, is a snobbish, self-oriented man living in a world of double standards. He is rather amoral for he has an extramarital affair with Myrtle Wilson but when he senses his wife's affair with Gatsby, he does not accept it. These actions of him render him rather patriarchal and sexist. Moreover, Tom is a racist because of his comments made against the immigrants of the 1920s America.

Nick Carraway, the cousin of Daisy, is presented as an observer of the events that take place in the novel. Nick symbolizes a part of Fitzgerald's character for he, like Fitzgerald, is rather critical of the 1920s society living in corruption. Nick experiences oscillations as to whether live in the decadent, corrupted society of the 1920s or to get away from it. However, at the end of the novel, he makes up his mind and decides that East Coast is not his cup of tea and retreats to Minnesota to lead a life in peace and good morals.

In his novel *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald professionally chronicles the exuberance, flaws and lives based on pleasure and enjoyment which the high profile people living the glamorous life in the 1920s lived within their daily routine in a very

natural manner. All the changes are depicted in a credible manner for one could easily relate the events taking place in the novel to the historical background of what the American values, culture and society went through during The Jazz Age, the time the novel is clearly set in. All the norms, values and trends of the age are reflected meticulously in the book as Canterbury explains, “The *Great Gatsby* was the exemplary novel of the Jazz Age in which Fitzgerald’s sharp social sense enabled him to vividly depict the excesses and false values of the upper class at a time when gin was the national drink and sex the national obsession” (1999; 301). Apart from depicting the societal flaws, Fitzgerald was very successful in giving a general picture of the pleasure-oriented atmosphere. While reading the novel, one feels himself/herself right in the center of a Jazz Age event;

The lights grows 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 prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp joyous moment the center of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea- change of faces and voices and colour under the constantly changing light. (40)

Materialism as one of the general themes and issues in the novel has its influences largely on society as well. *The Great Gatsby* was a reflection of a historical period of America when the society’s values were transformed in the negative sense and when people turned out to be unscrupulous resulting in an inclination toward materialism, pleasure and loss of values as Berman points out;

The Great Gatsby uses much contemporary historical material. The choice of place and subject, for example, was itself a statement. In 1924, H. L. Mencken, then the most influential American critic, identified the life of post-war New York City as one of the new subjects of the novel. That life was... vulgar, noisy, chaotic and immoral... he was fascinated by the same New York crowds that provide the background for Fitzgerald. He too understood their figurative meaning. The frenzied life of Manhattan, its open pursuit of sex, money and booze was, Mencken wrote... the reflection of Victorian public conscience by modern subjectivity. (2002; 81)

The dependence on money during the Jazz Age period was largely due to the “rootlessness of Postwar American society” as Lewis puts it and he also identifies

its “restless alienation and its consequent reliance on money as a code for expressing emotions and identity” (1985; 46). Thus, people attending Gatsby’s parties are suffering from a void within themselves and they, obviously, believe in filling this void with the advantages money brings. Showing up at Gatsby’s lavish parties is a way for them to express that they are somebody- that they belong somewhere thus, *The Great Gatsby* is a novel in which people form their identities through money and possessions. The same situation is also true for Gatsby because via his wealth, he forms a completely new identity be it true or false. Such a dependence on money reflects the weak personalities tainted by materialistic motives and quests which were all too common during Jazz Age.

In addition to society’s dependence on money in order to obtain status and power, ownership and the power over material possessions are of equal importance in terms of human relationships because in 1920s society, relationships, connections and even emotions were greatly based on the material power one had. Callahan suggests that “in Gatsby, sooner or later human feelings are negotiated in relation to property or some other form of material reality subject to ownership” (1996; 382).

Daisy’s change of conduct toward Gatsby is the strongest evidence reinforcing the statement above. Getting invited to Gatsby’s house, and her reaction to Gatsby’s t-shirts show how effective money is in terms of manipulating ones emotions and relations; “... she sobbed, her voice muffled in the thick folds. ‘It makes me sad because I’ve never seen such-such beautiful shirts before’” (*Great Gatsby*, 94). After this event we see a temporary intimacy between Daisy and Gatsby for Daisy gets affected by the power Gatsby has over material possessions. “[She is] moved not by the shirts themselves as by the emotion with which Gatsby has invested them” (Moyer, 1972; 221).

As for a general illustration of this society, it could be said that people that attend the parties that Gatsby throw are so sordid that they do not bother to talk behind the back of the host of the party. They have an inclination to gossip about him in the ugliest way without grounding their statements on solid facts, “somebody told

me they thought he killed a man once” (*Great Gatsby*, 44). What is ironic is that these people do not miss a single party of Gatsby, the man they assume to be a murderer and make the most of his glamour.

Society’s loss of values becomes evident with Gatsby’s death. People attending all the parties Gatsby threw disappear when they learn they should attend his funeral. Nick cannot hide his consternation, “why, my God! They used to come there by the hundreds” (177). The situation becomes even more tragic when Klipspringer calls Nick and asks for his personal belongings to be returned right after Gatsby’s death. Instead of sending, at least, his condolences he says, “what I called about was a pair of shoes I left there. I wonder if it’d be too much trouble to have the butler send them on. You see, they’re tennis shoes, and I’m sort of helpless without them” (177) adding, his attendance at Gatsby’s funeral would depend on a meeting with his friends. As is crystal clear, a pair of tennis shoes tops the value he gives to Gatsby. Thus, the conclusion to be reached is sad but true: Gatsby had always been lonely despite the people who filled his house and life and who were only attracted to his wealth and its grandeur, not him.

As mentioned in the previous section, there was a mounting detest toward the immigrants during 1920s on the grounds that they were largely associated with all kinds of illegal practices. Fitzgerald was fairly successful in reflecting the issue America had with its immigrants back in the early twenties. The notorious immigrants of America were reincarnated in the Jewish character of Meyer Wolfshiem who was reputed to have “fixed the World Series” in 1919. Apart from reflecting the notoriety of Wolfshiem, the Nativist attitude of the period is also felt in the book by means of Nick’s attitude and portrayal of Meyer Wolfshiem. Tyson explains this situation in the following statements, “Nick foregrounds Wolfshiem’s Jewishness to such a degree that even Wolfshiem’s criminal status becomes associated with his ethnicity” (2006; 405). In terms of Nick’s relating Wolfshiem’s criminal activities to his racial background, Decker is of the same idea as Tyson, “Nick’s stereotypical description of Wolfshiem is colored by racial nativism to the

extent that it carried with its traces of degeneracy associated with Semites'' (1994; 6).

The nativist approach that reiterates the emphasis on the white Anglo-Saxon superiority covers not only Meyer Wolfshiem but also people coming from outside of America and this attitude is obviously depicted in Nick's attitude towards others that are of foreign origin as Tyson supports;

it seems especially significant that there is one area in which Nick continually makes judgments about others with no apparent consciousness of doing so: in his numerous references to the plethora of minor characters who are in some way alien, to the privileged cultural group of his day, of which he is a member: white, upper- class, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. (2006; 404)

The implications Nick makes, the language he uses and the words he chooses to describe people other than the Anglo-Saxon race all serve as evidence to the nativist attitude of the 1920s America. Tyson further explains the situation as such; "... Nick's choice of words is certainly effective as colorful description, its relentless focus on the ethnicity of characters outside the dominant culture of Jazz-Age America hints at a disquieting dimension of his attitude toward 'foreigners', a dimension that becomes clear when he speaks of Meyer Wolfshiem" (2006; 404).

3.2.3.3 Symbols

While criticizing the American society and giving a meaning to his characters, Fitzgerald effectively makes use of symbols. The remarkable usage of symbols makes the novel's readers discover more beyond that which is presented and "see" between the lines. Instead of being straightforward on the message he wishes to convey, Fitzgerald chooses a method through which his readers would not only look but also see and interpret hence, he contributes to the establishment of a rather magical world where the abstract and the concrete are perfectly interwoven.

Apart from the symbols that serve as evidence of Fitzgerald's critical attitude towards and his reflection on the Jazz Age society, the writer's symbols derive their

metaphorical powers from American culture and history. Through his use of symbolism, one could easily see the binary oppositions between the past and the present of the American culture in the forms of values and ideals. Furthermore, the characters in *The Great Gatsby* could be interpreted as representatives of opposing historical figures which renders the dynamics of tensions between the figures even more intensively.

Instead of directing a straightforward criticism towards society, Fitzgerald uses two important symbols: the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg and the ash heaps. The ash heaps stand as a symbol of the unscrupulous society and their relationships, while the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg looking down on the ash heaps represents God. Fitzgerald deliberately uses both these images next to where Myrtle Wilson and Tom Buchanan have their extramarital relationship, namely adultery to make them serve as incarnations of the corrupt relationships between human beings. Thus, Dr. Eckleburg's brooding eyes over the ash heaps are no coincidence because of the fact that they are the perfect representation of God watching disapprovingly over people who have been lured astray. Mr. Wilson's expression regarding the advertisement reinforces and solidifies this image's meaning, "God knows what you've been doing. You may fool me, but you can't fool God" (*Great Gatsby*, 161). Here it is obvious that Mr. Wilson is acting as a worshipper complaining to God for the betrayal he has faced from his wife. As a result, through this symbol of God, the readers could easily sense the critical attitude Fitzgerald had towards the decadent Jazz Age society in general (Burnam, 1952 and Bettina, 1963).

The Buchanans are clearly the representatives of the brute, the physical and the material, "...they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made..." (*Great Gatsby*, 152). This statement of Nick solidifies their strong connections with violence and destruction. Their conduct, in general, is usually associated with violence be it in the concrete or abstract sense. In the concrete sense, first we see Tom Buchanan breaking Myrtle

Wilson's nose. Later in the novel, his wife, Daisy Buchanan, commits the act of running down Myrtle Wilson. Gunn puts it as such;

... when Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle Wilson, Tom's mistress, with Gatsby's car, the accident merely fulfills and completes that earlier act of violence which Tom committed against Myrtle himself and thus serves as a perfect expression of that reliance upon brute force, at once, physical and material, which holds Tom and Daisy and their kind together. (1973; 179)

In the abstract sense, this physically destructive conduct of Daisy also destroys Gatsby's own being and personality when he takes on the blame and becomes the murderer before the eyes of everyone, which finally results in his death. All these events do not affect the Buchanans for they take on an oblivious attitude again and leave behind the ruins of what they have destroyed as Nick states right after the death of Gatsby; "I called up Daisy half an hour after we found him, called her instinctively and without hesitation. But she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon, and taken baggage with them" (*Great Gatsby*, 166). In conclusion, all the events stated above prove as evidence to Buchanan's identification with their physically and spiritually destructive capacities.

Daisy appears to be a character that is self-centered, pleasure-oriented and materialistic. Throughout the novel, there is not a single conduct of hers purely carried out for the sake of others around her. All that she does is for her own material security and to her advantage. While Gatsby is presented as a lover who would even go so far as to take the blame for the murder of Myrtle Wilson that Daisy carries out, Daisy still cannot consider marrying him for fear of financial concerns. Hence, when Gatsby is in the army, trepidation and concerns gets the best of her and as a consequence, she abandons Gatsby, "she wanted her life shaped now immediately- and the decision must be made by some force- of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality that was close at hand" (152). As a result, that turns out to be Tom Buchanan who perfectly measures up to the standards Daisy considers appropriate for herself. This conduct of Daisy's is important because it is the strongest event that

justifies the fact that her selfish choices are made with regard to money and the power that comes with money. The situation is also important because of the fact that it proves Daisy's money-oriented nature, selfishness and materiality as Callahan explains in the following words; "Daisy's pursuit of happiness in the form of her dangerous, defiant love for Gatsby surrenders the palpability of a safe, material, unequal propertied union with Tom Buchanan" (1996; 382). All these events show that she is the strongest figure symbolizing materiality. Furthermore, the use of symbolic description and the identification of her with money- the sound of her voice, the tune, the "jingle" and the full "meaning" of it also puts Daisy somewhere far from the spiritual and much nearer to the physical in his readers minds (Bettina, 1963; 142). Callahan also identifies in her materiality in the following words; "[Daisy's] sense of happiness and good life depends on money and property" (1996; 380-381).

Even before the eyes of Gatsby, Daisy cannot be related with things that are spiritual and heavenly. This idea is supported by Posnock when he says the following; "she is never simply Daisy, but is inseparable from the objects that surround her" (1984; 206). Gatsby never mentions a thing about Daisy's character or what is within her. Instead, her attraction for Gatsby is based on money, glitter, wealth and property. She is the "king's daughter", the "golden girl" (*Great Gatsby*, 120).

The green light is representative of Gatsby's ideals related to Daisy. This is what Fitzgerald chooses to make it easy for his readers to see. However, beneath this meaning of the symbol, Fitzgerald gives a much stronger message: the myth of American dream is already corrupted for now the American society lacks the "fresh images" which long ago would put them into a whole new level with the universe and result in a marvel of American imagination presenting itself in the works of the names such as Jonathan Edwards, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and Hart Crane. (Gunn, 1973; 175) However, in *The Great Gatsby*, the readers encounter the fresh ideals' transformation into something so inferior that it could hardly be called an ideal at all. Gunn explains it in the following words; "the fresh, green breast of

the new world, which first presented itself to those unsuspecting Dutch sailors, has now diminished to the tiny, green light which burns all night on Daisy Buchanan's pier...' (1973; 175). The images which once set huge ideals for people and contributed to the founding of a nation are now reduced to a little green light symbolizing the pathetic ideal of winning a degenerate woman's heart through corrupted means of materialistic emulation and display. Thus, by reducing the respectability of the ideals of the self-made man who is the embodiment of the ideal American hero, the green light also symbolizes the changing and lowering ideals in American culture.

Tom Buchanan and Gatsby are symbols appealing to different phases of American culture and history. Tom Buchanan is a reflection of the Gilded Age's robber barons who "seized the land, gutted the forests, laid the railroads" and for their own material interests, transformed the cities into "urban centers." (qtd. in Matthiessen, 1941; 459). The narrow-minded men of the Gilded Age were like captain Ahab, not letting anything stand in their "iron way." All of the qualities above are fairly identifiable in Tom Buchanan who is selfish, tough and not willing to let anything that contradicts his interests stand in his way because he is so sure of his ways and conduct.

Despite living on false ideals and wrong assumptions, Gatsby, compared to Tom Buchanan, represents the Americans of an earlier generation who had anchored themselves to the shores of America so as to found the "kingdom on earth" which could be considered identical with the "kingdom of Heaven" for he is a character full of ideals and aspirations,, never letting go of his hopes and optimism towards his future (Gunn, 1973; 178-179).

The Great Gatsby is a novel in which Fitzgerald had major hypotheses he wanted to convey to his readers. One of them was to convey the message that the dream of the self-made man had long ago shattered as Gunn states in the following quotation; "a vision of possibility which had almost died on the eyes of those first Dutch sailors to these shores who, paradoxically, were the last to look out upon the

American landscape in innocence’’ (1973; 174). This was because of the fact that the pristine ideals were long ago transformed into tainted values. Exhibiting the long lost divinity of the self-made man myth, Fitzgerald criticized and showed the defects society and “American vision’’ had. What Fitzgerald wanted to add was that not everything was lost, that the hope towards the future should be preserved. Thus, his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*, was also a “historical repossession,’’ a chance to maintain the remaining pure “spiritual heritage’’ of Americans. (Decker, 1994; 55; Gunn, 1973; 174)

3.2.4 The Disintegration of the American Dream

The Great Gatsby is a highly influential novel in the American literary arena not only because it is grounded on the concept of the myth of the American dream but also for its remarkable portrayal of the period the novel is set in. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald portrays the transformation of the American dream’s pristine ideals into materialistic showing offs. The writer relates this transformation to the illicit ways the protagonist, Gatsby, chooses to fulfill his aspirations together with his false set of beliefs and judgments concerning the world he lives in. Apart from displaying the dreams of a young and aspirational boy, the writer successfully reflects the vivid atmosphere of the Jazz Age and through the characters, he touches upon the societal flaws of the period concerning bad morals, extravagance, decadence and the disintegration of spirituality resulting in an inclination towards materiality in general. Weinstein stresses this idea as follows; “the book seems to be imbued with excess: the tawdry excesses of the Flapper age, the wild parties, the flashy and not-so-flashy materialism of Gatsby, the excess of capitalism, the sentimental and blinding rags-to-riches story itself...” (1985; 22). Fitzgerald endows his novel with the professional usage of symbols. These symbols reinforce and serve as evidence to the critical attitude the writer took towards the changing values of the society, especially toward the rich. This idea is supported by Randall;

In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald aims directly at his target, the rich; and although his intense dislike is grounded not on intellectual or social but rather moral prejudices, on personal experiences, and on pathos that comes

dangerously close to bathos, one cannot help applauding his Condemnation. (1964; 58)

Gatsby presents himself as a diligent young man living for his dreams and after he attains the material success he has longed for so long, he emerges as the man who has risen from rags-to-riches. On the surface, everything seems perfectly normal however, it becomes obvious that Gatsby's ideals and his ways of achieving those ideals are not as pristine and as untainted as they appear to be.

Gatsby may seem like the ideal character with divine aspirations to ascend higher on the path of life however, his aspiration's being based on money, materialism and his false set of ideals disappoints the myth of the self-made man whose ideals are more identical to individual uplift through spiritually pristine values. "...Gatsby is imperfect: in spite of his idealism, his idea of the good life seems merely to be the acquisition of money, things, property" (Berman, 2002; 86).

Happiness, the main ideal that is to be considered to be a characteristic of the self-made man takes a different form for Gatsby because of the fact that it is not something merely spiritual. On the contrary, happiness for Gatsby is incarnated in Daisy who, ironically, is the sheer embodiment of materiality, "her voice was full of money he said suddenly... That was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals' song of it... High in a white palace ..." (*Great Gatsby*, 120). Thus, the main mistake Gatsby makes is his quest for spiritual relief in a girl whom even he relates with money. "[W]hat Gatsby, with surprising consciousness, states is that Daisy's charm is allied to the attraction of wealth; money and love hold similar attractions" (Lewis, 1985; 50). This situation is multi-dimensionally vital for not only does it prove Gatsby's mistaking happiness for the material but also it denounces the self-sufficiency factor of the American dream, for Gatsby's happiness does not depend on himself but on somebody else.

When hosting Daisy at his house, Gatsby displays how powerful he is by means of the excessive number of T-shirts he shows to her. The abundance and the luxury of the things he possesses proves to be a way of proving his power to Daisy,

both manly and materialistically. Posnock stresses this idea as follows; ‘his display of clothing a symbolic sexual act; it is his means of arousing Daisy’ (1984; 208). At this point, Gatsby believes that money and material possessions could have genuine spiritual influences on other people and as a result, lead to happy endings. However, he is wrong again for money and the luxurious things he possesses do not awaken genuine feelings of love in Daisy as he wishes it would. For a short period of time Daisy remains affected by the commodities Gatsby owns however, this influence does not take the form of the true love Gatsby wishes Daisy to feel for him. Moreover, Gatsby drives luxurious cars and lives in an excessively big, luxurious mansion where he could host hundreds of people. All of his extravagance is for the sole purpose of influencing Daisy. We understand this when he asks Nick to persuade Daisy to have a dinner at his house which will, in the end, prove to Daisy, that he is as powerful as Tom Buchanan and make Daisy fall in love with him again. This idea is also supported by Donaldson as such; ‘in a culture where pecuniary emulation predominates, the single most important object by which to declare one’s status is the house’ (2001; 204).

In conclusion, just as his false assumption of happiness is embedded in material things, Gatsby makes another mistake of believing that he could obtain happiness and acquire other feelings generating satisfaction through material possessions. Fahey explains this idea as such; ‘a naive dream based on the fallacious assumption that material possessions are synonymous with happiness, harmony and beauty’ (1973; 70). Hence, Gatsby corrupts the myth of the American dream by lowering its pure, untainted and spiritually pristine ideals down to the effect he expects worldly materialistic possessions would generate.

The fallacious paths Gatsby takes are other factors that fall contrary to the myth of the American dream. Gatsby, unlike what the myth of the American dream suggests, rejects the view of starting from the bottom and working to the top. Instead, he chooses to take a short cut and gets involved in illicit underground activities which quickly carry him up to the place he aspires to be. Gatsby gets mixed up with

immigrants that are dealing in bootlegging which was a very common illegal activity during the 1920s. Fitzgerald remarkably reflects this in his novel.

[U]nethical business practices provides obvious motivation for reading *The Great Gatsby*... and the fall of the self-made man....Gatsby, although apparently not the child of an immigrant, is a bootlegger who associates with unsavory new arrivals and vile members of the underworld.... One insists that the Great Gatsby wasn't great at all- just sordid, cheap, little crook. Evidence marshaled by Tom Buchanan's investigation into Gatsby's past supports such reading: 'Who are you anyhow?' broke out Tom. "You're one of that bunch that hangs around with Meyer Wolfshiem- that much I happen to know. I've made a little investigation into your affairs... I found out what your 'drug stores' were.'" He turned to us and spoke rapidly. "He and Wolfshiem bought up a lot of side-street drugs here in Chicago and sold grain alcohol over the counter. That's one of his little stunts. I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him and I wasn't far wrong. (Decker, 1994; 60-61)

As it is suggested by Decker, no matter how much Gatsby earns through the paths he chooses, the same paths equally take a toll on his respectability and prominence which is another contradiction of Gatsby to the self-made heroes of the American dream. Furthermore, by choosing to use the easiest way of realizing his aspirations, Gatsby is in opposition to the American dream's ideal of hard work. As a result, Gatsby's choice of wealth instead of honor and respectability and his choice of the quickest path leading to wealth, as a whole, are proof to the degeneration of the myth of the American dream.

One of the aspects of the American dream is its quality of looking ahead, leaving the past behind and never looking back again. Yet, Gatsby's biggest dream is to repeat the past, to go on with Daisy from the point where they left off,

He wanted nothing less of Daisy than that she should go to Tom and say 'I never loved you.' After she had obliterated four years with that sentence they could decide upon the more practical measures to be taken. One of them was that, after she was free, they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house- just as if it were five years ago. (*Great Gatsby*, 111)

The situation Gatsby puts himself in is unacceptable as Giles Gunn explains in the following manner;

Gatsby's proposal to rectify what he considers the mistake of Daisy's marriage to Tom, by asking her to request a divorce so that she can marry him instead, is based upon his incredible belief that history doesn't matter, that the past can be repeated. This is the ultimate flaw at the heart of Gatsby's dream... (1973; 179)

This situation is contrary to the myth of the American dream and its primary embodiment in literature, the Horatio Alger hero, for "fix[ing] everything just the way it was before" is something "no Alger newsboy ever dreamed, nor did Alger" (Kenner, 1974; 21). This false assumption of Gatsby, once more, ruins his statute as a self-made hero of the American dream.

Gatsby makes many mistakes that result in the disintegration of the myth of the American dream. One of the main reasons for the corruption of the myth is Gatsby's replacement of the myths' spiritual ideals with materialism. During this period, his fallacious relations and obsessions with the wrong people are other factors reinforcing the undermining of the myth. Despite the fact that these assumptions for a short time transform the "drab" materials of his world into elusive ideals this situation does not save Gatsby from his tragic end or from living in a world "material without being real." (Gunn, 1973; 182),

3.3 Concluding Remarks

The biggest similarities between *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* are that both novels portray the protagonist with aspirations, wrong set of ideals and living in a milieu of corruption. Both protagonists start their story with an attitude of confidence toward life but as the novels develop, this hope toward life wears away and transforms into disillusionment and tragedy. During their phases of hopelessness, they go through fluctuations of hope- Gatsby believing that Daisy will go to Tom and tell him that he loves Gatsby which will result in a new beginning, Lily, believing that she could start a new life with Selden after her encounter with Nettie. However,

these events do not hold the protagonists back from their tragic endings that result in death. As a consequence, it could be said that *The House of Mirth* bears traces of the disintegrating American dream with Lily's dream and her false set of ideals of optimism toward future blended with materialism. *The Great Gatsby* bears traces of naturalism for Gatsby is also trapped in the unjust working of the cosmos- he does what he believes will get Daisy back to her and he becomes rich, he sacrifices himself to save Daisy, he never loses his hope. Nonetheless, no matter what he does, his dream of getting back with Daisy cannot be fulfilled. Despite all the good things he does from altruism to genuine love, what he gets in the end is death- just as the naturalistic ending of Lily Bart.

CONCLUSION

The critical attitudes toward society Edith Wharton and Francis Scott Fitzgerald possess highly resemble each other. Both writers prove quite successful in their vivid reflection of the social environment they were a part of. The social milieu in both novels is portrayed as consisting of people who do not have morals and who seem to have lost their values. In the first place, both masterpieces deal with the issue of adultery: Bertha Dorset's extramarital relationship with Ned Silverton and Tom Buchanan's affair with Myrtle Wilson. Secondly, the social milieu both novels revolve around is rather corrupt because of its inclination toward money and pleasure as is evident in the places both novels are set in. The places exhibited in *The House of Mirth* are big houses full of partying glamorous people and luxurious voyages. Correspondingly, in *The Great Gatsby*, most of the novel's setting take place in great mansions with wide, maintained lawns and lavish parties with wealthy people.

The biggest similarity between Lily Bart and Gatsby is that both characters share a dream. Lily Bart aspires to her dream of bettering her social position through marrying a fairly wealthy man while Gatsby lives for the goal of winning back Daisy's long-lost love for him by means of the fortune he has acquired. Thus, another similarity lies in both protagonists' making use of certain things that they believe will fulfill their dreams- for Lily a man's love leads her to her dream of leading a wealthy life; for Gatsby a wealthy life leads him to the love of Daisy. In conclusion, it could be said that both novels intersect through the concept of a dream and the interplay between love and money.

The instrumentalization of the environment is another link that binds the two novels. Whether they are with the wrong people or not is not important for the protagonists because their social milieu is justified by its utility to serve as an instrument to fulfill their dreams. For Lily, social environment is very important because it bears the potential of providing her a wealthy husband. It is an instrument to see others and to be seen by others. For Gatsby, the parties he throws and the

people coming to those parties are of great importance because through them he gets the opportunity of seeing Daisy and to be seen by Daisy.

Both novels exhibit the overt nature of the relationship between material possessions and individual perception. While Lily Bart measures every single man based on the power he has on material possessions, for Gatsby, material objects' values increase depending on the attention they receive from Daisy Buchanan. Looking at these situations, one would not be wrong to conclude that while Lily Bart judges people depending on the power that comes with their wealth, Gatsby, quite the opposite, evaluates things based on his love, Daisy.

Another similarity between the two characters is their choice of fallacious ways of living for the sole purpose of realizing their goals in life. In *The Great Gatsby*, the protagonist carries out illicit activities related to bootlegging. In doing, this brings him in contact with the wrong type of people in order to achieve the wealth to influence Daisy Buchanan. While, Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth*, gambles and spends money extravagantly despite the fact that her financial situation is not suitable for these activities. In conclusion, it could be said that the conduct Lily and Gatsby exhibit is highly identifiable in terms of their lavish, extravagant and fallacious natures.

Both Lily and Gatsby are presented with many people that appear to be their friends. However, both characters' choice of friends proves to be defective because of the fact that both figures establish friendships with the wrong people. The two mentors and colleagues of Gatsby, Dan Cody and Meyer Wolfshiem, are men involved in illegal activities resulting in making Gatsby one of them. Furthermore, Lily Bart's friendship with Bertha Dorset and Judy Trenor takes its toll on her when Bertha Dorset accuses her of having an affair with her husband and when Judy Trenor gives her the cold shoulder when she suspects Lily Bart of seducing her husband instead of believing her. Moreover, as I have stated previously, Judy Trenor distances herself from the heroine when Miss Bart ceases to gamble and wear "smart" clothes, a situation that cannot be identified with true friendship. All these

events serve as evidence of how fake the friendships are and how wrong the choices that both protagonists make are.

Apart from the similarities between Lily Bart and Gatsby, one of the most noteworthy similarities between *The Great Gatsby* and *The House of Mirth* is the materialistic nature of Daisy Buchanan and Lily Bart. Both women could be considered more or less at the same point on the issue of money and the choices made under the influence of money. Daisy Buchanan abandons Gatsby because of the fact that he does not measure up to her expectations in regard to quality of life and instead decides to get married to Tom Buchanan who complies perfectly with her expectations of opulence and grandeur. Just like Daisy Buchanan, Lily Bart refrains from any romantic involvement with Selden, the only man she truly falls in love with. The reason for this stems from Selden's materialistic inadequacy to feed the heroine's aspirations related to money, a situation which is also true for Gatsby.

Both novels bear evidence of the Spencerian phrase "survival of the fittest." As discussed previously, Bertha Dorset's power, which stems from her wealth, greatly contributes to her social relations and even puts her in an elevated position above everyone despite being the guilty one while Daisy's break up with Gatsby and her sudden marriage to Tom Buchanan on the grounds that he is wealthier than Gatsby both justify the social Darwinian view that the most wealthy ones are the fittest ones and thus the perceived real survivors of social relations, constitute another close relationship between the two works.

Just like *The House of Mirth's* Lily Bart, who behaves in the right way both in her relationships with her friends and in her altruistic behavior when she hides the letters addressed to Selden sent by Bertha Dorset, Gatsby in his own way, behaves in the right manner as well, by taking on Daisy's crime of murdering Tom's mistress. But neither does Lily get what she deserves in return for her impeccable conduct towards others nor does Gatsby's protection of Daisy from the crime she has committed bring her back to him. All these events justify another connection

between *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* which is that both works convey the message that good deeds do not guarantee happy endings with just conclusions.

Throughout the novel, Lily struggles very hard to face up to the difficulties she encounters for the sole purpose of fulfilling her dream of marrying a man that could provide her the material comfort she wishes for herself. However, the things she goes through prove that no matter how hard she tries, she cannot overcome her predetermined fate which in fact gradually brings about her downfall. Similarly, Gatsby tries so hard to win back Daisy's long-lost love toward him. He even achieves the rags to riches story through his strife and struggles. Nonetheless, all his struggles prove futile because no matter how hard he tries, his dream of getting back with Daisy never materializes which could also be attributed to the deterministic working order of the universe. Hence, it could be said that, both novels' protagonists are exposed to the merciless laws of their respective predetermined fates that ultimately render them helpless.

Considering the similarity between the two works, as mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it comes as little surprise that the endings of the novels have the same degree of tragedy. For despite all the efforts the protagonists make to fulfill their dreams, they prove in vain and result in death.

The Great Gatsby and *The House of Mirth* are seemingly completely disconnected novels because while one stresses the myth of the American dream, the other attracts attention due to its structure bearing dominant traces of naturalism. However, both novels are, in fact, highly identifiable and comparable with each other as well, in terms of their plot, critical points Wharton and Fitzgerald make, setting and themes. Both novels say a lot about human nature, the relationship between the real and the ideal and finally dreams and disillusionment. Their noteworthy use of myths, remarkable depiction of literary movements, aspirational beginnings, and finally their twists and tragic endings has justified and reinforced *The Great Gatsby's* and *The House of Mirth's* place in the American literary arena for many decades and

all these factors shall go on maintaining both novel's prominent positions in America's culture and Americans minds forever.

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