



Universidad
Zaragoza

Undergraduate Dissertation
Trabajo Fin de Grado

Disillusionment in William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Author

Paula Mora García

Supervisor

Claus Peter Neumann

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

2023

ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the comparative analysis of *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) by William Faulkner and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald, two novels that are renowned representatives of the sociocultural sentiment of America at the beginning of the 20th century. The objective of this dissertation is to provide an in-depth analysis of the characters, the symbolism and the elements related to American tradition in the novel. In doing so, this study aims to illustrate the questioning of old values brought about by the Great War and the disillusionment during the postwar period, paying special attention to the so-called Roaring Twenties that flourished particularly in the North and the decline of the South in the United States.

Key words:

Modernism — Puritanism — Disillusionment — Femininity — Heroic Quest

RESUMEN

Este trabajo está orientado al análisis comparativo de *El ruido y la furia* (1929) de William Faulkner y *El gran Gatsby* (1925) de F. Scott Fitzgerald, las cuales representan la actitud sociocultural de los Estados Unidos a principios del siglo XX. El objetivo de este trabajo es ofrecer un análisis exhaustivo de los personajes, el simbolismo y los elementos relacionados con la tradición norteamericana que aparecen en las novelas y, a través de dicho análisis, ilustrar cómo se pusieron en entredicho los antiguos valores tras la Gran Guerra y la desilusión durante el periodo de posguerra, haciendo hincapié en los llamados “locos años veinte”, especialmente prolíficos en el norte del país y en la decadencia del sur en los Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave:

Modernismo — Puritanismo — Desilusión — Feminidad — Búsqueda del Héroe

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: THE LOST GENERATION	5
2. WASTELANDS OF MODERNITY	
2.1 THE DECAY OF THE SOUTH: MISSISSIPPI	8
2.2 THE “ROARING TWENTIES”: NEW YORK	10
3. THE LONGING FOR THE PAST	
3.1 GATSBY AS THE INCOMPLETE HERO	13
3.2 QUENTIN AS THE TORMENTED HERO	16
3.3 DAISY BUCHANAN AS A SYMBOL	19
3.4 CADDY COMPSON AS A SYMBOL	22
4. CONCLUSION	25
5. WORKS CITED	27

1. INTRODUCTION: THE LOST GENERATION

For the younger writers of our day time has come to a dead end. Inwardly assured that life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing, they are not weighed down by the burden of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

—Charles I. Glicksberg, “The Lost Generation of Literature”

The decay of traditional morality in the Western world during the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century was popularly reflected in Nietzsche’s famous statement “God is dead” (167), which was a motto that characterized the general feeling of discontent and disarray that the writers and philosophers from the beginning of the 20th century had. A sense of nothingness was prevalent during this time, which intensified after the Great War had challenged everything that had constituted the foundation of humanity. All the traditional values and religious beliefs in which society had been grounded were violated in an enormously destructive war. A feeling of generalized disillusionment hovered over the West, in a postwar world that had changed the common understanding of what humans are capable of. In this highly dehumanized world, matters such as religion, morality and traditions became meaningless and were cast aside. Significantly, this was a time where there was a major and hazardous shift in technological advances that included poison gas, war tanks and an infinity of different trench weapons all designed to end human life. All of this brought about a despondency and stagnation that translated into a philosophical and economic crisis, including two recessions in 1918 and 1920 (Anderson and Chang 2).

Guiyan Li talks about the philosophical situation at the beginning of the 20th century and explains: “the spiritual culture was in decline, and this was reflected in

the population's frame of mind" (300). Philosophical conceptions such as the previously mentioned 'death of God' represent the existential and spiritual crisis that was affecting the Western world, where traditional morality that was conventionally based on religious beliefs and dogmas, such as Puritanism in the United States, had lost its value and influence. The popularization of philosophical doctrines such as nihilism added to the generalized sense of alienation and disappointment with current values that were replacing the ones that had been questioned due to the experience of the war, which eventually led, for some, to a yearning for new values and, for others, to a nostalgic look towards past ideals. These are characteristics that are representative of the Lost Generation.

The Lost Generation is a nuanced term that, as Marc Dolan explains, has "multiple meanings and functions" and is therefore "difficult to classify" (208). It encapsulates the historical and psychological context that came into being after the First World War and found its peak in the twenties, which is precisely why the Lost Generation is often referred to as the post-World War I Generation. Although the phenomenon of the Lost Generation was not exclusive to the United States, this dissertation focuses on US-American novelists that belong to that generation. The term "lost" is used to describe the "inherited values that were no longer relevant in the postwar world and because of its spiritual alienation from a United States that seemed to its members to be hopelessly provincial, materialistic and emotionally barren" ("Lost Generation"). Francis Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner, in his early works, are both noteworthy writers that serve as representatives of this generation of American writers.

Novels like *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sound and the Fury* deal with the aftermath of this rapidly degenerating world and the effect it had in different parts of the United States, particularly, New York in the North and Mississippi in the South.

The ideas that we find in the literature of the Lost Generation are the same ones we find in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sound and the Fury*. The novels offer insightful depictions of the decay of traditional America, not only in the form of detailed descriptions but also through the stories and the psychology of the characters, which was a key element that modernist authors wanted to put the focus on by means of innovative techniques. Malcolm Cowley describes the “inter-war generation” of authors as “modernists who had been making dozens of technical experiments” (95), such as Faulkner’s interior monologue and other stream of consciousness techniques and Fitzgerald’s use of symbolism and lyricism.

The central point of these novels is the characters, their inner world and their stories and not so much the political and economic turmoil of the time, which instead remains in the background, making these novels socially aware and critical but not insurgent or combative in their approach. Malcolm Cowley defines these American novelists as being “rebellious but not revolutionary and disillusioned and passive rather than active in their mood” (95). The two novels at hand manifest awareness of the social environment of the country and deliver criticism with their subversive deconstruction of classical monomythic narratives in the stories of Gatsby and Quentin, who are portrayed as flawed American antiheroes. The characters and their heroic journey are demystified and viewed with a critical distance that is charged with irony and an imperious nostalgic tone.

2. WASTELANDS OF MODERNITY

2.1 THE DECAY OF THE SOUTH: MISSISSIPPI

The abandonment of traditions after the Great War and during the early 20th century is represented by the society of the Roaring Twenties that we see in New York in *The Great Gatsby* but also in the decay of the Old South in *The Sound and the Fury*. In both novels, we find a binary opposition between the past and the present. The memory of the Civil War, the Great War and their aftermath contrasts with the eclectic environment of the twenties, where consumerism and mass culture had completely taken over and the traditional, agrarian America was progressively disappearing and had become something from the past. The American Civil War brought the first big change in the economy and politics of the South, and marked the beginning of the end of old Southern culture in the United States, which only intensified during the first half of the 20th century, due to the First World War, industrialization and an agricultural depression that, according to Frank E. Smith, was the “forerunner of the Great Depression, which ground its heel into the South more deeply than any part of the country” (279) and therefore posed a major threat to the Southern traditional lifestyle that had been heavily rooted in agriculture up until that moment.

In order to understand *The Sound and the Fury* as a novel that represents the deterioration of the American South we must not only understand this aforementioned context but, even more importantly, the ideological implications behind the novel: “Faulkner is, of course, a Southerner, and he possessed a deep feeling for the soil, a recognition of the land’s importance and the effects it can have. . . . for the land is the basis of Southern life and economy, and upon it the legend of the South has been painfully and gloriously constructed” (Breaden 344).

In the Southern tradition, the land, passed on from one generation to the next, is representative of traditional values, family honor and fertility. In *The Sound and the Fury*, we are introduced to a Southern aristocratic family, owners of a plantation. For a family like the Compsons, the land was not only the symbolic bearer of their heritage but their main means of livelihood. In the novel, we find a very deteriorated picture: what once was an important and great family has been forced by the circumstances to sell their lands and, as a result of this, they have lost their status, their power and their sustenance. Taking this context into consideration, we might begin to grasp the importance of the land for a family like the Compsons, something that is often referred to in the novel and that will become Quentin's burden, as he is constantly reminding himself: "on what on your school money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard don't you see you've got to finish now if you don't finish he'll have nothing Sold the pasture" (Faulkner 104).

In the same way that the Southern agrarian traditions, values and economical influence are in decline due to the changing times, we also see this decay reflected in the Compson family, as was the case of so many upper-class families from the South in the United States. Warren Beck explains that a family like the Compsons, particularly Quentin, still see the South as "the deep South, dead since 1895" (85). Beck adds that the "final rut of decadent formality and tradition is symbolized in the closing sentence of *The Sound and the Fury*" (86), where we see Benjy observing the unchanging scenery and holding a broken flower, which conveys a contrasting image of an abiding but declining South. Faulkner gives some insight to the crumbling consequences that two wars and a transforming world had upon a society that was grounded in conservatism and reluctant to change.

2.2 THE “ROARING TWENTIES”: NEW YORK

We are in a world—very much a twentieth-century, media-permeated urban world—where the boundaries between ‘life’ and ‘art’, stereotypes and private individualities, have lost their definiteness and in which the question of when some of the characters are being truly ‘themselves’ becomes almost impossible to answer.

—John Fraser, “Dust and Dreams and *The Great Gatsby*”

In *The Great Gatsby*, the city of New York becomes a sort of microcosmos, with people, places and a new culture that cannot be found elsewhere in the country. Despite their peculiarities, the characters we find in the novel are meant to represent certain types, since they portray a common personality of the twenties. Daisy Buchanan is the spoiled lady that embodies old money and has become a sort of trophy wife, since she is objectified by her husband and, in essence, everyone around her. Other characters, such as Jordan, represent the “New Woman” or the so-called flappers of the period. Most importantly, Gatsby himself is a self-made man who has created a multimillionaire heroic character by appropriating all the good qualities of the American gentleman. Gatsby has created what John Fraser describes as a “Rich-Young-Suffering-Hero persona” (555). The truth about all of these characters is that they are all playing a role in the show that is the 1920s society, where authenticity is slowly disappearing and becoming rather rare to find, hence why someone like Nick Carraway, a simple and ordinary Midwesterner, seems to be so out of place. The choice to make someone like Nick the narrator is evidently not coincidental: by seeing these characters through the eyes of someone that is not a part of this consumerist, modern and urban New York society, the perception of these characters as artificial is further emphasized.

As Leland S. Person, Jr., puts it, the novel describes “the death of a romantic vision of America and embodies that theme in the accelerated dissociation—the mutual alienation—of men and women before the materialistic values of modern society” (251). The exacerbating transformation of values in this modern society is particularly symbolic in the representation of the different spaces in the city. The decaying morality that we see in the 1920s in the city of New York is epitomized by the Valley of Ashes, which represents the counterpart of the reckless and extravagant society that is drowning in consumer culture and has lost touch with reality and traditional values. The characters of the wealthy elite enjoy the economic boom, completely unaware of the rickety situation that the country is bound for, as they live in a completely different reality than the rest of the United States, where illegal alcohol and jazz eclipse the economic and societal impairment that the country is headed toward.

The Valley of Ashes becomes the other side of the coin of the never-sleeping New York. In contrast to the fancy and lavish lifestyle that Gatsby and the people surrounding him thrive on, people that live in the Valley of Ashes are miserable, overworked and underpaid. The descriptions of space stress the dichotomy between the rich areas and the Valley of Ashes. The Valley is described as a “fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens” and the men living and working there are said to be “ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through powdery air” (Fitzgerald 19). It is particularly ironic how, despite being set in the mid-twenties, a postwar period where the United States was breeding ground for a deep depression, the characters seem to focus on partying and spending, whereas the Valley of Ashes, despite its profound symbolism and importance, only becomes a passing thought for them.

New York and the Valley of Ashes are presented as a moral wasteland where we see the results and the extent of human corruption and inequity. However, the only person who seems to be concerned by this is the Midwestern newcomer Nick Carraway, while the others simply turn a blind eye as they pass by in their fancy cars. Similarly to what we find in *The Sound and the Fury* in regard to the decay of the land, in *The Great Gatsby* we find this Valley of Ashes observed intently by the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. Somehow these eyes seem to be there to judge humanity, as if they were God's eyes on earth.

Carraway and Gatsby are both protagonists of the story in their own way, and both are “searchers who begin their quests in the Middle West” (Carlisle 351), a part of the United States that represents a more traditional and provincial America. Nick arrives at the salacious and consumerist Big Apple with high expectations fueled by the tantalizing charm of the metropolis and the innocence of a young Midwesterner. Incidentally, *The Great Gatsby* is not only about Gatsby's love story but also about Nick's own personal growth and realizations as he experiences the obscene urban world. In this sense, he narrates his own story, in which Gatsby becomes “an important agent in Nick's movement from innocence to awareness” (Carlisle 351). It is towards the end of the novel that we see Nick's transformation as he prepares to leave New York and return to the Midwest. In the end, he has had enough of the city: “Even when the East excited me most, even when I was most keenly aware of its superiority to the bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio . . . even then it had always for me a quality of distortion” (Fitzgerald 107). New York, then, is described as a distorted version of America, something that is both appealing but bizarre in its artificiality and materialistic utopia.

3. THE LONGING FOR THE PAST

3.1 GATSBY AS AN INCOMPLETE HERO

The truth was that Jay Gatsby, of West Egg, Long Island, sprang from his Platonic conception of himself. He was a son of God—a phrase which, if it means anything, means just that—and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty. So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

The nostalgia and longing to relive a happier past that is impossible to recuperate torments both Gatsby and Quentin. Indeed, both of the protagonists are heroes on an impossible quest to recover the past. Daisy Buchanan and Caddy Compson become the objects of their obsessions and delusions because they represent the glorious times that they long for. In *The Great Gatsby*, we are introduced to Jay Gatsby through the gaze of an easily impressionable Nick Carraway, who often finds himself idealizing—and idolizing—Gatsby; being swayed by the reassuring smiles, the friendly “old sports” (e.g. 33) and the fascinating display of money. Gatsby has an aura of mystery and expectations surrounding him from the very beginning of the novel and it is as we progress in the story that we get to know his past and the real Gatsby.

As we soon find out, Gatsby is truly a self-made man, a perfect example of the rags-to-riches story. It was in his younger years that he had fallen in love with Daisy, who even back then was already unattainable due to the class division between them. After being conscripted into the army, Gatsby comes back home to find Daisy is long

gone and this sets the timer on for Gatsby, who resolves to get his precious love back and become a man that, according to his own parameters, would be worthy of Daisy.

This is how Gatsby, the romantic hero, is created. In this way, Fitzgerald was capable of bringing to life a pseudo-medieval knight, offering us a beautifully written subversion and modern reinterpretation of a story of ‘courtly love’ that is missing the most important part: the happy ever after. Indeed, some may see Gatsby as a knight of the 20th century; a self-made man with romantic ideals and a dream—an American one. Nevertheless, in *The Great Gatsby* we see a sophisticated deconstruction of the American Dream and the Puritan ideology that was so characteristic of traditional America and was still prevalent during the 20th century. The Puritan work ethics tried to guilt-trip the everyday man into working harder, often for little in return. Winthrop S. Hudson offers an interpretation of Max Weber’s ideas about Protestantism and American capitalism, which explain that success was interpreted as “a sign of God’s blessing” (5). Hudson maintains that there is a “remarkable coincidence of a particular religious affiliation with a particular social status” (4). This ethic and spiritual ideology suggest that through hard work, persistence and vocation one can achieve success, respect, social status and renown. This is the same creed Gatsby has followed in his quest. However, despite being a prime example of a self-made man, Gatsby is far from being an adequate representative of the religious ethics that lie behind the Puritan ideology.

However, other philosophers such as Nietzsche suggest that to believe in God is to be doomed. Guiyan Li puts the German philosopher’s words into perspective and argues that religion “cannot bring the good future it promises [and] consolation from God is an illusion” (302). Similarly, the novel highlights the incongruities of the Puritan work ethic, which, in a capitalist society, contradicts fundamental Christian

principles such as loving your neighbor as yourself, helping those in need or the importance of spiritual values over material possessions.

This hypocrisy is brought to the surface in *The Great Gatsby*, not only by depicting the inequity and poverty abounding in New York, but also in the fact that Gatsby's achievement of success and wealth is rather questionable and dishonorable. As is suggested in the novel, Gatsby is involved in organized crime activities, which were particularly prominent during the Prohibition, such as distributing illegal alcohol. But despite being a criminal who, like many others, elbowed his way forward at the expense of others, Gatsby's dream was not really about money or status. Those were just the means to a greater end: Daisy. This is precisely what makes Gatsby a romantic hero and what makes us sympathize with him to a certain extent. As Fraser comments: "to have large romantic ideals is almost certainly to be mistaken, because of the nature of ideals, but to attempt to do without them is to live emptily and to thwart a permanent human craving" (555).

It is easy to disregard Gatsby's problematic attitudes and assume that he is a self-made hero who is only driven by his romantic ideals and as such, he deserves admiration and love. But it is behind the veil of all the romance, the glamour and the frenzy of the story that we find the real Gatsby: the antihero. John Fraser explains that "by dividing Gatsby's 'power' from the evil concomitants of that power and thereby emphasizing the heroism of his 'dreams'" (563), Fitzgerald manages to lightly conceal as well as insinuate Gatsby's criminality and present a duality between the heroic, romantic and dreaming Gatsby and the doomed delinquent with a heart and soul riddled with holes. The "foul dust" (Fitzgerald 7) that stirs up symbolizes the incomplete hero that he is: the money that he has earned in dishonorable ways, the social status he has reached but that has not granted him the respectability he sought and, ultimately, a requited but hopeless love.

3.2 QUENTIN AS A TORMENTED HERO

Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women.

—William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

Quentin's heroic journey shares some similarities with and differences from that of Gatsby. Eventually, both of their stories lack a happy ending and lead to their deaths. Quentin is consumed by the guilt and the shame he feels for not being able to live up to the expectations as the heir of an aristocratic family with a past of prestige. He fails to protect Caddy against what his inherited belief-system considers to be corruption and preserve the family honor. Moreover, the Compsons are forced to sell something as important and necessary for them as their land in order to pay for Quentin's university tuition, as is relentlessly remembered by Quentin in the novel.

Quentin's agony has its roots in the fact that he is the heir of a family whose previous greatness is in decay, and it only worsens when he fails to protect his little sister's virginity and the family honor is subsequently tainted. On top of that, his life away from his family at university only makes matters worse for Quentin, who feels displaced at Harvard. Peter Lurie explains that the decision to make Quentin study at Harvard in 1909 is a rather interesting one, considering that "Faulkner and many others in Mississippi would have known that at that point, as well as in 1929, this was not the Ivy League school most likely to accept Southerners" (63). Indeed, it seems that Faulkner purposefully put Quentin in Harvard to make visible that he feels out of place, which serves as a means to emphasize his condition of Southerner as well as bring to the surface the North-South axis dilemma.

When this is extrapolated to the overall context of the novel, we can see how the novel subtly portrays that the North is somewhat engulfing the South and how Quentin, as a Southerner, does not fit into the new America, where Southern values, ideologies and culture are slowly being pushed to the back or even rejected. Quentin is intelligent and is the family's highest bet to recover the family's prosperity, which is exactly why they take the great risk of selling their land and sending him to a university of high prestige such as Harvard. This could be seen as an attempt to adapt to the changing times so as to maintain their position and wealth. Unfortunately, Quentin's inability to keep his sister's virtue intact and thereby fulfill his self-imposed role as a safeguard of the honor of the South, takes an enormous toll on him and will be one of the reasons for his death.

The importance given to Caddy's promiscuity can be partly explained by the relevance the Puritan doctrine puts on a woman's purity, connecting it directly to her worth and honor. As Lawrence E. Bowling explains, "Quentin has already begun to develop a strong Puritan sense of morality, and also to view Caddy as the symbol of absolute purity and innocence" (470). However, it is undeniable that Quentin's obsession with Caddy and his disproportionate reaction to the loss of her virginity seem inappropriate even from a Puritan perspective, to the point where he is willing to lie about having an incestuous relationship with Caddy as well as taking responsibility for her pregnancy; a revelation that, alarmingly for Quentin, elicit a rather nonchalant response from his father. This becomes an intense trigger for Quentin, who has always lived by the Puritan and Southern moral values. When two of the people who are most important to him, his little sister and his father, the person who is supposed to act as a guardian and guide for him, completely abandon and dismiss this moral code, he simply cannot process it, which causes him emotional turmoil.

Southern conventions, morality and culture are challenged, and Quentin becomes a representation of the classical white Southern male personality who is unable to adapt to the changing world. Susan V. Donaldson offers an interpretation of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's historical examination of the elite white male Southern identity and sets Quentin Compson's "obsessive ponderings on family and personal honor" as an example (5). As Donaldson explains, Wyatt-Brown shows how dependent the Southern male identity was on reputation and how "vulnerable that sense of identity was to any sort of disruption or challenge" (5). This is exactly what we see happening to Faulkner's tormented Southern hero Quentin, who is confronted with a reality different from the one he is familiar with, not only regarding the northern customs but also his own family's situation and attitudes, particularly those of his father and sister. All these circumstances simply become unbearable, eventually leading to his suicide.

Talking about Quentin's obsession, Peter Swiggart explains that, "like his father, he can find no meaning in the future, and the present seems illusory. There is no recourse but absorption in the past" (222). Accordingly, Quentin's watch becomes one of the most palpable symbols of his torment in the novel. The watch, which he inherited from his family, represents his inability to escape his preoccupation with time, his fixation on holding onto the past and the family honor he failed to preserve. His futile attempt to break the watch conveys how inexorable and merciless time can be. As May Cameron Brown explains, "because time is his enemy, responsible for his loss of Caddy and hence for his suffering, he seeks to destroy it by breaking his grandfather's watch" (545). Ultimately, the only solution to his torment is his own death, a very fitting denouement for Faulkner's tragic hero: "what he can do and finally must do is to defeat time by destroying himself" (546), thus closing the never-ending cycle of regret and guilt.

3.3 DAISY BUCHANAN AS A SYMBOL

For Daisy was young and her artificial world was redolent of orchids and pleasant, cheerful snobbery and orchestras which set the rhythm of the year, summing up the sadness and suggestiveness of life in new tunes.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

The objectification of women is an element that is found in both novels at hand. Rather than characters that act as protagonists on the same level as their male counterparts, both Daisy and Caddy become symbols instead. Despite being central characters in both novels, they lack a voice and we only see them through the eyes of the male characters. We quickly realize that Daisy is an object under the gaze of her husband as well as that of Gatsby. Leland S. Person, Jr., talks about the objectification of Daisy and argues that she is actually a victim in the story: “she is victim first of Tom Buchanan’s cruel power, but then of Gatsby’s . . . depersonalized vision of her” (250). She becomes Gatsby’s reason to live and grow, a sort of silver lining or Polaris symbolically represented by the green light at the end of the Buchanans’ dock. Daisy also becomes a symbol of the American aristocracy: the trophy wife that, despite having all the money and time imaginable to spend, lacks the freedom to do so. Considering the materialistic world that Daisy lives in, Gatsby believes that assets, luxuries and money will make him worthy of her; in a way, he thinks she can be bought with money, and he is not totally wrong. Gatsby’s vision of Daisy becomes an allegory of the American Dream and hope in itself, although Daisy represents a corrupted version of it. As Barbara Will comments: “Nick sees Gatsby as the incarnation of this national impulse, this ‘extraordinary gift for hope’ using the same term—‘wonder’—to describe Gatsby’s desire for Daisy Buchanan and that of the first American colonists gazing at ‘the fresh green breast of the new world’” (126).

Put into perspective, this symbolizes the existing gap between Gatsby and Daisy and how the former had to resort to a life of criminality in order to obtain wealth whereas the latter was born into it, which is, in Gatsby's mind, one of the reasons why he thinks of her as an unattainable and superior being. This is, particularly, another way in which we see the objectification of Daisy, which connects the story to medieval romance. If we understand *The Great Gatsby* as a modern reinterpretation of a medieval romance, that makes Gatsby our chivalric hero and Daisy the damsel in distress. When comparing the novel to the Arthurian legends, we can see that symbolically, Daisy represents the Holy Grail, the ultimate trophy and Gatsby's goal. Leland S. Person, Jr., describes Daisy as becoming "the unwitting 'grail'" (250). However, this understanding of their story leaves something very significant out of the picture: Daisy's wants, which ultimately go against those of Gatsby's.

The similarities between Gatsby and Daisy's love story and medieval courtly love epics are undeniable. One of the major characteristics shared is the dehumanization of the fair lady, the unattainable woman that is seen as an object of idolatry, as is the case with Gatsby's obsession with Daisy: "courtesy was created by men for their own satisfaction and it emphasized a woman's role as object, sexual or otherwise" (Benton 35). Gatsby is compared by Elizabeth Morgan to the medieval romantic hero by pointing out the similarities between him and C. S. Lewis's description of the courtly lover as someone "obedient to his lady's slightest wish, however whimsical" and always "weeping on their knees before ladies of inexorable cruelty" (1-2). After years of chasing after her, she has become, in his mind, an ethereal entity that encapsulates his love and desires. The moment they reunite and his long and arduous quest finally comes to its culmination, Gatsby's idealized fair lady materializes and he does not know how to face her.

It is when she becomes real in his eyes that the fantasy shatters and Gatsby is left to pick up the pieces and put them—and himself—together. In a way, Gatsby also becomes a victim of Daisy's lack of commitment to their love and her impulses and whims. As Elizabeth Morgan points out, even when Daisy accidentally kills Myrtle in a reckless accident, Gatsby "takes the un-witting punishment and dies alone, abject. Clearly, Gatsby is a victim of Daisy's every equivocation and impulse, a lover without identity outside of his desire" (167). Indeed, through a game of allegory and symbolism, the novel insinuates that Daisy's purity and innocence are only an illusion. Starting with her name, Daisy Fay, the novel suggests a certain purity but also a fairy or nymph quality to the character. A pure but elusive and playful fairy is exactly what Daisy appears to be. The name Daisy is also reminiscent of Henry James' *Daisy Miller*, "as a type of all-American girl subject to masculine attentions" (Luft and Dilworth 80). However, we can also establish a connection to Morgan le Fay, a female character who, in medieval romance, has come to acquire a "function of death which is always the other side of such a female archetype" (Fries 13).

The novel could, thus, be seen to parody courtly love and propose an ironic subversion of the traditional medieval romance narrative by offering us two flawed characters that break with the fixed, idealized notions of classic romance literature. Both Gatsby and Daisy disrupt traditional values as they are far from being virtuous and honorable characters: "the chief of Fitzgerald's ironies is that Daisy's purity and virtue turn out to be her holistic incarnation of the values of the rich and the hopes of the middle class" (Morgan 175). By making Gatsby a criminal and Daisy a superficial woman that ultimately chooses reputation over happiness, the novel breaks the romantic spell and instead gives us a dose of disenchanting reality.

3.4 CADDY COMPSON AS A SYMBOL

Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry and she came and squatted in the water.

“Hush now.” she said. “I’m not going to run away.” So I hushed. Caddy smelled like trees in the rain.

—William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*

The idea that Caddy smells like trees is recurrently repeated throughout the novel and emphasized by Benjamin, as he describes her: “Caddy smelled like trees” (e.g. 4). We can establish a connection between this and the idea that “women have traditionally been perceived as closer to nature and men as closer to culture” (Roach 50). We can find examples of this association in other American novels such as John Steinbeck’s *The Pearl*, where the character of Juana has a close relationship to nature. Nevertheless, Caddy’s smell changes once she puts on perfume; she no longer smells like trees. This is yet another metaphorical way of portraying the corruption of Caddy as a symbol of purity according to the Southern female canon. Contrary to leaves or trees, perfume is an artificial smell, which represents the breaking of her connection to nature. Moreover, the image of Caddy putting on perfume can be linked to the loss of her innocence and the fact she is no longer a child: she is becoming a woman, with all the implications that this brings along.

Caddy’s femininity can be connected to a longing for a sentimentality that goes back to the literature of the 19th century, which was female-oriented and focused on family and domesticity (Cassuto 10). This sentimentality finds its roots in the Puritan understanding of a traditional American family, heavily based on conventional gender roles that present the woman as a mother and wife and reduce femininity to fit into those same roles.

This Puritan doctrine was a major part of Southern culture and moral values. In the character of Caddy we see this so-called sentimentality manifested as love, tenderness or sympathy, which are all attributes that have been traditionally associated with femininity. This is made evident in the way she treats Benjamin. While everyone else always punishes him for crying, Caddy always gently comforts him: “You mustn’t cry. Caddy’s not going away” (34). In this sense, Caddy is much more than a caring older sister for Benjamin, in the same way that she is much more than a little sister that needs to be protected for Quentin. In their own way, both of them have created a dependency on Caddy.

Catherine B. Baum explains that Caddy becomes a “cohesive force” in the novel, as she is the “central concern of each brother and the telling of her story is the common purpose of each section” (34). In the case of Benjamin, Caddy becomes somewhat of a mother figure since she not only takes care of him but is also one of the few people that show some affection and compassion towards him. In the case of Quentin, and similarly to the case of Gatsby and Daisy, she becomes the object of his love and obsession. For both of her siblings, Caddy represents a femininity that evokes the love of a mother and makes up for the lack of it at the hands of their real mother. In Quentin’s own words: “If I’d just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother” (145). This is the Caddy that represents the canon of female purity. However, although these archetypal feminine qualities are intrinsically positive, this stereotypical image of femininity is challenged and subverted in the novel. Caddy’s breaking away from conventions and, thus, her liberation starts with a very symbolically charged moment: “Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn’t have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water” (14).

In this section of the novel, the children are playing in the stream and Caddy wets her dress and underwear with mud. Faulkner has described this as a crucial moment in the novel. After seeing her muddy pants, Benjy bursts out crying. In this particular scene, Faulkner plays with the symbology of water as representing cleansing and purity; the image of the children playing in the stream seems to epitomize purity and innocence. However, the mud in her pants suggests otherwise, alluding to Caddy's later promiscuity and the challenging of Southern Puritan doctrines. All of this foreshadows what a Southern puritanical point of view would consider to be the corruption of her purity: the loss of her virginity and her subsequent pregnancy out of wedlock, which eventually drive her away from the house and the family, as she is disowned. This is an image that evokes the fallen Old South, the decay of Southern values and traditions as well as the loss of family honor, according to Puritan belief. What Quentin sees as the corruption of Caddy will torment him all through his short adult life. Catherine B. Baum describes Quentin as the "best suited" to tell this part of Caddy's story, since he has an "overpresent concern with chastity and honor" (34) and is therefore the one that is the most affected by Caddy's actions, to the point where they become his obsession and damnation.

Despite being denied a narrative voice and instead serving as a symbol of the corruption of Southern morality and virtue, Caddy is much more than that. She is the central focus of the novel and her corruption can only be considered as such in the Southern tradition and in the eyes of Quentin. According to Baum, Caddy becomes a sort of heroine—in light of the story lacking a proper hero—and is "the only Compson who loves without thought for self and with a genuine desire for the happiness of others" (36), which ultimately and—in view of society's condemnation of her—ironically make her one of the few virtuous characters in the novel.

4. CONCLUSION

William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* are two novels that, at first glance, may be completely disparate and deal with different topics. And while this is, to a certain extent, very true, both novels share a fair amount of similarities that make them worth comparing. Both authors are inter-war novelists that, during the 1920s, formed part of the so-called Lost Generation, which we can discern when analyzing the novels and uncovering the agendas behind them. As we have seen, Faulkner and Fitzgerald are both modernist writers that pay special attention to the psychology of the characters and their development throughout the story in what seems to be a hero's quest—with an ironic and bitter twist. The psychology and emotions of the characters become powerful elements in these novels and the narrative style used heavily falls into what could be called a reflective approach. However ambiguous, the social commentary and critique is certainly there, slightly camouflaged and shrouded in romance and tragedy. The characters and how their stories unfold are seemingly the main focus, but when looked at closely, we can see the alienation and the discontent of the time reflected in the characters' eyes.

As has been argued previously, Quentin and Gatsby are haunted by their destructive obsessions. They both challenge the classical chivalric quest narrative in their own tragic way. Likewise, Daisy and Caddy are also flawed characters that break with the conventions traditionally associated with women historically and in literature. The distorted personalities and complex natures of the characters in the novels symbolize the contemporary state of traditional values and morality in the Western world.

It would be impossible to end this dissertation without talking about Quentin and Gatsby's peculiarly similar yet distinct deaths. Significantly, their heroic quests end tragically in the water, which is inevitably reminiscent of the "Death by Water" section in T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Likewise, both novels symbolically play with water and offer an ironic subversion of it as a motif that conventionally signifies renewal and rebirth. Instead, in *The Great Gatsby* water functions as a symbol of the distance between Gatsby and Daisy, separated by the Manhasset Bay, only linked by the green light. In *The Sound and the Fury*, water alludes to Caddy's transformation into a sexually active woman, represented by the muddy drawers. In the case of Quentin, and in line with Christian ideas about the "inherent powers of cleansing and purifying" of water (Chamberlain 6), Quentin's death leads to a possible metaphorical resurrection through his niece, Quentin Compson, Jr. In the case of Gatsby, on the other hand, water has lost its restorative function and does not signify renewal but only death, which, as previously mentioned, parallels T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

In these and many other ways, the novels analyzed in this dissertation move away from social, literary and cultural conventions, portraying, with critical distance, the loss of traditional moral values of the past and expressing their disillusionment with the present.

5. WORKS CITED

- Anderson, Haelim, and Jin-Wook Chang. "Labor Market Tightness during WWI and the Postwar Recession of 1920-1921." *Finance and Economics Discussion Series 2022-049*. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Aug. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.17016/FEDS.2022.049>.
- Baum, Catherine B. "'The Beautiful One': Caddy Compson as Heroine of *The Sound and the Fury*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1967, pp. 33-44. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26278645>.
- Beck, Warren. "Faulkner and the South." *The Antioch Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1941, pp. 82-94. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4608822>.
- Benton, John F. 1968. "Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love." *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, edited by F.X. Newman, State U of New York P, 1968, pp. 19-42.
- Bowling, Lawrence E. "Faulkner and the Theme of Innocence." *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1958, pp. 466-87. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4333892>.
- Breaden, Dale G. "William Faulkner and the Land." *American Quarterly*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1958, pp. 344-57. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2710348>.
- Brown, May Cameron. "The Language of Chaos: Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury*." *American Literature*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1980, pp. 544-53. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2924957>.

- Carlisle, E. Fred. "The Triple Vision of Nick Carraway." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1965, pp. 351–60. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26278564>.
- Cassuto, Leonard. *Hard-Boiled Sentimentality: The Secret History of American Crime Stories*. Columbia UP, 2009.
- Chamberlain, Gary. "From Holy Water to Holy Waters." *Water Resources Impact*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2012, pp. 6–9. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/wateresoimpa.14.2.0006>
- Cowley, Malcom. "1944: The Generation That Wasn't Lost." *College English*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1960, pp. 93–98. <https://doi.org/10.2307/373960>.
- Dolan, Marc. *Modern Lives: A Cultural Re-Reading of "The Lost Generation"*. Purdue UP, 1996.
- Donaldson, Susan V. "Faulkner and Masculinity." *The Faulkner Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1999, pp. 3–13. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24907812>.
- Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. 1929. Vintage Classics, 1995.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Fraser, John. "Dust and Dreams and *The Great Gatsby*." *ELH*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1965, pp. 554–64. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2872258>.
- Fries, Maureen. "From The Lady to The Tramp: The Decline of Morgan le Fay in Medieval Romance." *Arthuriana*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1994, pp. 1–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869041>.
- Glicksberg, Charles I. "The Lost Generation of Literature." *Southwest Review*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1953, pp. 211–18. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43463870>.

- Hudson, Winthrop S. "Puritanism and the Spirit of Capitalism." *Church History*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1949, pp. 3–17. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3161054>.
- Li, Guiyan. "Nietzsche's Nihilism." *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2016, pp. 298–319. <https://doi.org/10.3868/s030-005-016-0022-5>.
- "Lost Generation." *Britannica Academic*, 2022. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lost-Generation>. Accessed 11 July 2023.
- Luft, Joanna, and Thomas Dilworth. "The Name Daisy: *The Great Gatsby* and Chaucer's Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, vol. 8, 2010, pp. 79–91. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41583156>.
- Lurie, Peter. "The South Rises: Revenance, Region, and the Idea of Place in US Literary History." *The Faulkner Journal*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2016, pp. 63–78. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44578813>.
- Morgan, Elizabeth. "Gatsby in the Garden: Courtly Love and Irony." *College Literature*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1984, pp. 163–77. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111591>.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Vintage Books, 1974.
- Person, Leland S., Jr. "'Herstory' and Daisy Buchanan." *American Literature*, vol. 50, no. 2, 1978, pp. 250–57. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2925105>.
- Roach, Catherine. "Loving Your Mother: On the Woman-Nature Relation." *Hypatia*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1991, pp. 46–59. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810032>.

Smith, Frank E. "The Changing South." *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, vol. 31, no. 2, 1955, pp. 276–91. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26442667>.

Swiggart, Peter. "Moral and Temporal Order in *The Sound and The Fury*." *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 61, no. 2, 1953, pp. 221–37. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27538210>.

Will, Barbara. "*The Great Gatsby* and the Obscene Word." *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2005, pp. 125–44. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115310>.