POST-WORLD WAR I AMERICAN AND BRITISH MICROCOSMS IN F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY* AND VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *MRS. DALLOWAY*

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***Abstract**: The aim of this paper is to explore the connections between F. Scott Fitzgerald's* The Great Gatsby *and Virginia Woolf's* Mrs. Dalloway*, pointing out the cross-cultural affiliations. Published in 1925, only a month apart, the two novels provide an insight into the lives of the upper-middle class in the same time period in their respective countries. Both novels are influential modernist masterpieces that represent experimentalist departures from the traditional novel and show remarkable similarities in their innovations in form and narration as well as in their complex psychological explorations. The post-war universe is filled with disillusionment and fragmented identities that Clarissa Dalloway and Jay Gatsby try to mend through the artifices of parties. As satires that comment upon the ideals of the 1920s, these two novels centred on the twinned cultural capitals of London and New York offer a mapping of a contemporary post-war urban world, tracing the British and American cultural and social microcosms and focusing on the symbiotic relationship between the urban microcosm and the modern subject.*

***Key words**: microcosm, public and private subjectivity, the emancipation of women, space and place, trauma, social satire.*

The aim of this paper is to explore the connections between F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, pointing out the cross-cultural affiliations. Published in 1925, only a month apart, the two novels project an extravagant social canvas of the lives of the upper-middle class in the same time period in America and Britain. A parallel between the cultural and social contexts of the two English-speaking countries will be drawn, pointing to the depiction of the two post-war cultural capitals, London and New York, the emancipation of women, the perception of space and everyday life as well as the parties as markers of the discrepancy between private and public subjectivity. The disillusionment with the myth of the British Empire and its counterpart, the American Dream, will equally be examined. As satires that comment upon ideals of the age, these two novels of the city offer a mapping of a contemporary post-war urban world, tracing the British and American cultural and social microcosms and focusing on the symbiotic relationship between the urban microcosm and the modern subject.

Both novels are influential modernist masterpieces that represent experimentalist departures from the traditional novel and show remarkable similarities in terms of plot, innovations in form and narration, as well as in their complex psychological explorations. Set in Long Island, in the summer of 1922 and in London, on a Wednesday in June 1923, respectively, *The Great Gatsby* and *Mrs. Dalloway* depict analogous events. They both have a romantic subplot which involves a young woman marrying a high-ranking member of society. Clarissa marries Richard instead of her friend, Peter Walsh, while Daisy Fay is betrothed to Tom Buchanan. As a man from their past arrives in town, the rekindling of their love is made possible. Still, both women choose to preserve the life they have. It is the reasoning behind their marriage choices that is so different. If Clarissa rejected Peter because she could not

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accept his controlling nature, Daisy could not leave the world of 'old money'. It seems that the British upper class still preserves its values to a certain degree whereas its American counterpart features characters that are materialistic, vain, hedonistic and corrupted, participating in organized crime. Nevertheless, the trauma, alienation and anxiety produced by the war are themes reflected upon in both novels through the use of modernist narrative techniques, namely the stream of consciousness technique and free indirect style in *Mrs. Dalloway* in comparison to the first person narrator with shifts in point of view in *The Great Gatsby*. These connections are closely related to the metropolitan backdrop against which the events unfold.

Metropolises may be regarded as microcosms of a broader global sphere. As miniature worlds that allow transnational connections, they reflect changes in the spatial, mental and social patterns of the macrocosm. The dichotomy of microcosm and macrocosm has occupied a central position as early as ancient times. The denotation of microcosm originates in ancient Greece. In Aristotle's *Physics*, the term was briefly mentioned in relation to concept of *mimesis* introduced by Plato. The idea was reinforced by the basic principle devised by Democritus who stated that "man is a small universe" (qtd. in Le Blay 251) and the Hippocratic medical treaties which argued that "our body is an imitation (*apomimesis*) of the universe" (qtd. in Le Blay 252). The human body was a microcosm displaying the elements of the ordered universe, its humours corresponding to the four natural elements. The medieval worldview preserved the Ptolemaic worldview, emphasizing the creation of man in the image of God and the Church as a mystical body. The notion of microcosm was constantly redefined by subsequent writers, ensuring its passage into modern literature. From the famous lines of John Donne, "I am a little world made cunningly" (Donne 21) to the psychological microcosm of the Romantic poets whose minds were a "mansion for all lovely forms" (Wordsworth 194), the notion of microcosm was finally revisited by Walter Pater in *The Renaissance* (1873).

The ideas promoted by Walter Pater had a substantial influence on modernist thought, especially on its perception of reality. In the conclusion of *The Renaissance*, Pater argued that there is no boundary between man and nature since the human body is no more than "a combination of natural elements" (Pater 186) which extend beyond it. The microcosm of the body and the macrocosm share the same condition. Moreover, reality is in a constant state of flux, "loosed into a group of impressions" that the human mind groups as "a design in a web" (Pater 187), notion which will be further developed by Virginia Woolf in the essay *Modern Fiction*. As it will be discussed in the paper, the novels of Virginia Woolf and F. Scott Fitzgerald display this exact porous nature of reality, with the characters and the city mirroring one another up to the point in which they form a symbiotic relationship, while equally providing insight into the distressing years of war. The protagonists reflect their cities which in their turn convey the larger scope of British and American society.

The World War had left a great mark on both the American and the British milieu, leading to a social and cultural modernization. F. Scott Fitzgerald writes about the Jazz Age that "[i]t was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire" (*The Jazz Age: Essays* 4). *The Great Gatsby* depicts the frivolity of the age, portraying the typical residents of both East Egg and West Egg as people without any further purpose who drifted "here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" (*The Great Gatsby* 6). Impressive mansions, loose morals, money made as quickly as it is spent, excess of material possession – the post-war American way of life is depicted as an endless party with echoes of jazz rhythms reverberating the glamour of city life.

In contrast to the American frivolity, Peter Walsh, walking in London for the first time in five years, praises the productivity of the passers-by. Namely, "doctors and men of business and capable women all going about their business, punctual, alert, robust, seemed to

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him wholly admirable" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 55). Peter Walsh appreciates the traditional efficiency and seriousness of the English but, at the same time, notices the intrusion of new values such as the freedom of the press to write about taboo subjects as well as the emancipation of women. He remarks:

> Those five years – 1918 to 1923 – had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. Now for instance there was a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water-closets. That you couldn't have done ten years ago – written quite openly about water-closets in a respectable weekly. And then this taking out a stick of rouge, or a powder-puff and making up in public. On board ship coming home there were lots of young men and girls [...] And they weren't engaged; just having a good time; no feelings hurt on either side. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 71)

Indeed, the war played a pivotal role in the emancipation of women from traditional gender roles, given their newly found economic and social independence. In Britain, laws were passed in 1918 that gave women over thirty the right to vote, as long as they were either householders or married to householders. In America, the 19th Amendment was ratified in August 1920, allowing all women, regardless of their social status, to exercise the right to vote. Elizabeth Dalloway's independence and interest in a professional career clearly establish her as an example of the New Woman. The confident way in which Elizabeth moves around contrasts greatly with Clarissa Dalloway's feelings of invisibility within the city. Clarissa is the embodiment of the ideas about femininity promoted by the previous century, and her relationship with the city is shaped by the gendered division of spaces. Therefore, she is more connected to the social, domestic sphere of life. However, every profession is open to women of the new generation, from law and medicine to politics. Riding the omnibus, Elizabeth is inspired by the city to pursue a career:

> And she liked the feeling of people working. She liked those churches, like shapes of grey paper, breasting the stream of the Strand. [...] In short, she would like to have a profession. She would become a doctor, a farmer, possibly go into the Parliament if she found it necessary, all because of the Strand. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 136)

While *Mrs. Dalloway* seems to be focused more on the professional opportunities offered to the new generation of women, *The Great Gatsby* presents the transitioning of restricted and oppressed women to ladies with liberties. Throughout the Roaring Twenties women began to act in rebellious manners for the first time, with their fashions, hairstyles, new abilities such as driving and playing sports, as well as a more open sexuality. The flapper became the female representative of the era. According to Sanderson, "this young woman represented a new philosophy of romantic individualism, rebellion, and liberation [...]; the flapper should be regarded as one of the great authentic characters in American history" (143). Jordan Baker embodies the flapper image through her bobbed hair and slender body with an erect posture, her profession of champion golfer and her habits of smoking and drinking. Still, America is apparently a place where a girl could cope best by being pretty and slightly silly. Daisy remarks about her daughter that "the best thing a girl can be in this world" is "a beautiful little fool" (*The Great Gatsby* 17). In a patriarchal society, Daisy and Myrtle unsuccessfully try to affirm their independence through extramarital relationships. Eventually, Daisy turns out to be as insubstantial and shallow as the powdery white dresses that she is wearing, while the passion that Myrtle manifests violently turns against her.

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The emancipation of women occurs to a certain extent in the British and American milieu in the twentieth century. There is a juxtaposition of the fear of emotions, the need for stability and the longing for personal freedom in the behaviour of female characters. Consequently, they all seem to cling to unsatisfactory marriages. Clarissa "had the oddest sense of being herself invisible" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 8), feeling stripped of her own identity because she is primarily seen as the wife of Richard Dalloway. Similarly, Daisy and Myrtle are manoeuvred by the men in their lives, especially by Tom Buchanan. In neither couple do the spouses actually know one another, despite having been married for years. It is fair to assume that Daisy and Tom share a companionship that suggests partners in crime rather than in love, while Clarissa and Richard share an understanding that implies Clarissa's right to independence in return for her being the perfect hostess for her husband's parties. The observation that Nick Carraway makes about Tom and Daisy is equally true about Richard and Clarissa. In the end, they "weren't happy ... and yet they weren't unhappy either" (*The Great Gatsby* 115).

There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between the characters and the setting as their experience of the urban space reveals important psychological traits. According to Beidler, both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Great Gatsby* "are in large part novels of the city, centred on the twinned postwar cultural capitals of the Anglo-American world, London and New York" (2). The novels reveal the cities as lively places full of memories and possibilities. Hence, the city of London acts as the link between characters, witnessing and recording their lives:

> what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her [...] but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 9)

London's streets, parks, buildings are a part of Clarissa and of all the people who have walked by them. Through the marks they leave on these places, the memory of them lives on.

While *Mrs. Dalloway* offers a more optimistic message due to her "odd affinities" with "people she had never spoken to" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 153), New York is the city of wild promises. Nick Carraway remarks that "[t]he city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty of the world" (*The Great Gatsby* 44). Unlike London, New York is presented as a city of wild promises, of the American Dream that leads to a beautiful but emotionless and impersonal life in which characters fail to relate to one another.

The relationship between city life and the modern subject has been the topic of both critique and praise from various writers. Henri Lefebvre offers a comprehensive analysis of everyday city life which he perceives as "residual, defined by 'what is left over' after all distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities have been singled out by analysis" (Lefebvre 97). However, city life is not entirely depleted, it is an imperfect expression of totality that is "profoundly related to all activities, and encompasses them" (Lefebvre 97). In spite of its monotonous, repetitive component, the "human raw material" sometimes manages to pierce through alienation and establish what Lefebvre refers to as "disalienation" (97). While Lefebvre describes everyday life as residual, Virginia Woolf displays a fascination with the mundane and explores the multidimensional nature of everyday experience. In the essay *Modern Fiction* (1921), the events of an ordinary day unfold as a complex and exciting

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"myriad impressions" (Woolf 158). The tedious, repetitive urban rhythms that Lefebvre observes are opposed to the perception of life not as "a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged" but "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf 158).

Thus, the metropolitan consciousness in the vision of Virginia Woolf succeeds in finding "the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance which each sight or incident scores upon consciousness" (Woolf 159) and consequently transforms space into an extension of the character. The geographical and the psychological, the outer and the inner become interconnected through the filtering of the former by the latter. For Michel de Certeau, the discovery of these patterns constitutes the basis of the distinction between place (*lieu*) and space (*espace*). In "Spatial Stories," Certeau states that "*Space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers" (Certeau 117, original emphasis). Place is static and defined only by a stable configuration of positions. Space is dynamically engaged in the historical and social changes that its passers-by experience. In "The Metropolis and Mental Life," Georg Simmel investigates even further the effects that the impersonality of the city space has on the metropolitan individuality. According to Simmel, the modern subject is faced with an "intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli" (Simmel 103). The results of these stimuli are either hypersensitivity, as in the case of Mrs. Dalloway or Peter Walsh, or indifference as it is displayed by the Buchanans. Again, the characters and their urban microcosms are shown as complementary.

In the post-World War I world, technology and humanity merge to the extent that machines serve as symbols of agency and identity. For instance, while Tom drives a more traditional car, he refers to Gatsby's ostentatious, opulent auto as a "circus wagon," undermining its general identification as a sign of success by labelling it as a symbol of the nouveau riche who do not possess the sophistication of the aristocracy. In England, the same brand of car, the Rolls-Royce, is a symbol of British refinement, tradition and monarchy, while the omnibus is the cheap means of transport which gives the new generation a chance to feel the pulse of the city. The characters themselves are described in mechanical terms. Tom is "sturdy," with "shining, arrogant eyes," the "enormous power of that body" allowing his muscles to be seen "shifting" beneath his clothes; his body being "capable of enormous leverage" (*The Great Gatsby* 7). In London, Peter Walsh unsuccessfully tries to keep up with a marching crowd of boys in uniforms who "marched, their arms stiff, and on their faces an expression like the letters of a legend written round the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 51). The association with the world of machines foreshadows the spleen and the violent release of emotions in the novels.

Consequently, in these urban microcosms governed by cupidity and alienation, the extravagant parties become unifying forces. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, the culminating event planned since the very first sentence of the novel is a party given on the evening of the day in which the novel is set. Jay Gatsby equally creates a whole scenario in which the fairy-tale parties would lead to his retrieval of his lost love. Both Clarissa and Gatsby act as hosts, as puppeteers who stage an idealistic version of the world in which they try to project their own hopes and values. Accordingly, the American counterpart to Woolf's representation of the social gathering as civilized entertainment depicts the parties as big, lavish, drunken and loud. The excess of the American parties is reflected, for instance in the manner in which Gatsby's "Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight" (*The Great Gatsby* 39). As models of class arrangements, they are as vulgar and various as the Dalloway gathering is polite and select.

In contrast, Peter Walsh notices on his way to Clarissa Dalloway's party the way in which "cabs were rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn

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together" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 164). Like Gatsby, Clarissa intends to "draw together" her community and thus acquire a sense of purposeful public selfhood. The parties become a spectacle, a performance designed to show to the world a carefree, lively, sociable persona and enhance the reputation of the host. Nevertheless, in both cases the parties reinforce the opposition between appearance and reality. The two protagonists reflect the spirit of an age broken by the war that is trying to mend the ruptures which have occurred in identities and lifestyles through the artifices of parties.

The parties are markers of the discrepancy between private and public subjectivity. The characters in both novels seek to preserve or re-establish the order and stability of the pre-World War era. For Mrs. Dalloway, the aim is to achieve harmony and create a memorable moment for her dinner guests. For Jay Gatsby, the aim is to return to the moment of genesis in his relationship with Daisy Fay before he was called to war. However, their endeavour fails in the long run. The social events give only the illusion of fulfilment and connectedness. In contrast to their public façade which celebrates life, the private selves of Clarissa and Jay are still influenced by the destruction caused by the war and the impossibility to turn back time. In this respect, "Clarissa's constant oscillation between the inner and outer world corresponds to an oscillation between a traditional past and a modern present" (Ciugureanu 211). Times have changed in the twentieth century and so have people. The death of a man could become the subject of a casual conversation at a party in London or the front page of an American newspaper. The dream of unity and harmony pursued by Clarissa Dalloway and Jay Gatsby is smothered by the pragmatic approach to life of the nouveau riche.

There is a disparity between the social and private concerns of Clarissa and Gatsby, but both realms are essential to their authentic sense of self. According to Nesher, "*Mrs. Dalloway* represents awareness, intensity, and intimacy not between characters in conflict but within characters for whom their setting, human and man-made, invites contemplation" (201). Clarissa spends her public moments at her party prancing, sparkling around the room and expressing her desired appearance of the hostess who can gather people "with the most perfect ease and air of a creature floating in its element" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 174). However, this façade breaks as Clarissa finds out about the suicide of Septimus: "She felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 186). Mrs. Dalloway feels the pressure of upper class life just as Septimus feels overwhelmed by the pressure of innumerable war deaths. Reminiscent of Lefebvre's festival, the parties may represent "exceptional moments" (Lefebvre 250) which produce at the same time a sense of communality and a divorce from everyday life.

Clarissa comes to reconsider her purpose in her social circles as Mrs. Dalloway the hostess. Henke argues that the party she organizes "creates a mode of being seen as fundamentally separate from mundane life and serves as a stage for moments of heightened consciousness" (142). Mrs Dalloway believes that by throwing a party, she would ease the minds of people from the stress of a mechanical life and will help her guests reflect on their true character. The parade of the various figures belonging to the aristocratic circle, the discussion about death at her party lead to Clarissa's questioning of the meaning behind her parties and behind life itself. As a response to the implied criticism she feels from Peter Walsh about the senselessness of her parties, the hostess envisages an imaginary dialogue which offers the key to her endeavours: "But suppose Peter said to her, 'Yes, yes, but ... what's the sense of your parties?' all she could say was (and nobody could be expected to understand): They're an offering..." (*Mrs. Dalloway* 121). Clarissa asserts to herself that her work is not empty, it is an expression of her affection for life. The parties could be interpreted as an offering, a ritual honouring unattainable ideals.

From this perspective, Clarissa's and Gatsby's reasons for organizing the parties are similar. Jay Gatsby has an ardent wish for material potency and plans to hide his true identity,

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that of James Gatz the soldier, son of a poor farmer. His ambition to reinvent himself as the successful socialite Jay Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (*The Great Gatsby* 98) as well as from his pursuit of an unattainable fairy tale. His parties are an offering for the Daisy, "the king's daughter, the golden girl" (*The Great Gatsby* 120). The image of Daisy is worshipped by Gatsby. In her honour modern temples are built, festivities are held and sacrifices are made. Still, the innocence of the dream that he pursues is antithetical to the criminal means by which he organizes them. Jay Gatsby becomes a fragmented, paradoxical figure of innocence and vice. Similarly, the apparently firm British microcosm, among whose representatives is Clarissa, may be as divided between innocence and vice. It is implied throughout the novel that Clarissa has not been able to completely realize her affection towards Sally Seton from the days she lived at Bourton. Moreover, she marries Richard only to stand by the norms of her society. There is a clear loss of identity and a fragmented self which she tries to find through arranging parties. The meticulous way in which Jay and Clarissa orchestrate the events of the parties are for her nothing less than a religious festival which ends with their being "cast down from the highest points to the lowest depths" (Lefebvre 251). Such moments of exaltation are transient.

Both Clarissa Dalloway and Jay Gatsby want to repeat the past. On the one hand, Gatsby wants to return to the beginnings of his relationship with Daisy Fay before he was called to war. On the other hand, Clarissa reflects on how her past affected her present situation, her thoughts and decisions. An idyllic image of the years before the war is present in both novels through a young Clarissa with her hopes of intellectual and spiritual self-realization and a Jimmy Gatz with his self-improvement schedules and golden dreams of success and romantic love. Neither character thoroughly realizes their dreams and thus both have a difficulty in coping with the bleak reality. Daisy Fay and Sally Seton represent for Gatsby and Clarissa an escape from present reality, an idealized image of the past that the protagonists cling to. Although Sally and Daisy from the present are married and associated with the responsibilities of motherhood, they remain a retreat into the world of romantic imagination.

Disillusionment and trauma characterizes the post-war British and the American microcosms of the upper (middle) class. Nevertheless, the ruling class seems to be reticent about openly discussing the disintegration of its ideals of greatness. By resorting to a stoic attitude the British governing class appears to be ignoring the significance of the war. For instance, in spite of the death of her son, Lady Boxborough moves on with her life and opens a bazaar, feeling relieved that "it was over; thank Heaven – over" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 4). Peter Walsh equally muses about "thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 115). Ironically, the feeling of relief brought by the end of the war in Britain is sensed across the ocean at the beginning of the confrontation. In the American urban microcosm, the war easily becomes the initial topic of conversation between Nick and Gatsby. Gatsby confesses to Nick, "[t]hen came the war, old sport. It was a great relief, and I tried very hard to die, but I seemed to bear an enchanted life" (*The Great Gatsby* 66). The war proved to be exactly the opportunity that James Gatz needed to reinvent himself. Through his eyes, the destruction brought about by the war led either to death or to a life of charm. However, the enchanted, sumptuous way of living of the upper (middle) class on both continents hides the decline of two cherished myths.

The war had left a scar on two of the most highly held myths, British empiricism and the American Dream. The one character who seems to be deeply affected by the aftermath of the war is Septimus Smith, a war veteran who suffers from shell-shock. Considered to be almost a double of Clarissa, Septimus shares many of her concerns about the modern world, posing questions over the legitimacy of the British Empire that he fought to defend. The crisis of the self that Septimus suffers from reflects the crisis of identity the Empire was

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undergoing. His unstable shell-shocked mind correlates with the anxiety and uncertainty of the Empire following the war. Both the Empire and Septimus have survived the war, but have gone through irreversible damage. Septimus manifests the hypersensitivity towards the stimuli of the city that Simmel discusses, brought, however, to the extreme. Since he is not psychologically equipped for handling the intense rhythm of the city, by the end of the novel he commits suicide, overwhelmed by the wickedness of the world.

Jay Gatsby, a war veteran, displays a different version of shell-shock, which has made him alienated and delusional as well. From the first lines of the novel, Nick Carraway remembers Gatsby as someone defined by "an unbroken series of successful gestures" (*The Great Gatsby* 2). The protagonist has an artificial manner of interacting with those around him, his gestures are calculated and rehearsed, his lines sound scripted. His mechanical and fabricated demeanour reveals his lack of substance. Gatsby faces the world with a mask that has become so convincing that it manages to fool even the person who wears it. These features are visible, for instance, in the description of his behaviour at one of the parties:

> my eyes fell on Gatsby, standing alone on the marble steps and looking from one group to another with approving eyes. [...] it seemed to me that he grew more correct as the fraternal hilarity increased. When the "Jazz History of the World" was over girls were putting their heads on men's shoulders in a puppyish, convivial way, girls were swooning backward playfully into men's arms, even into groups knowing that someone would arrest their falls – but no one swooned backward on Gatsby and no French bob touched Gatsby's shoulder and no singing quartets were formed with Gatsby's head for one link. (*The Great Gatsby* 50)

Through this lens, the alienation, isolation, lack of empathy and inability either to share the euphoria of his guests or to form any connections, point to the symptoms of shell shock that Septimus displays. War leads to the death of the soul. Nevertheless, unlike Septimus, the trauma that Gatsby experiences materializes into a reverie. He weaves a tapestry of his life before and after the war, creating a new morality for himself. The process of reinventing oneself helps Gatsby hide the wounds acquired during wartime; at the same time, however, it leads to his destruction and to the downfall of the American Dream. The ideals of freedom and happiness for which this myth stands for are replaced by a quest for material possessions and by immorality.

The Great Gatsby comments on the ideals of the 1920's, revealing the mores of the American upper-middle class. The elements of satire include the excesses of the nouveau riche, their affectation, ignorance and shallowness. For instance, Tom Buchanan discusses at one point the 'scientific' ideas regarding the superiority of the white race. If *Mrs. Dalloway* alludes to the fall of the British Empire, the rise of a "coloured empire" is feared across the ocean. His ideas seem to be approved by the rest of the members of the upper-middle class. Nick remarks on seeing rich black people driven by a white chauffeur "[a]nything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge" (*The Great Gatsby* 69). All dreams of freedom crumble in the face of a self-centred society. Gatsby's attempt to provide a lasting consolation is futile. The whole novel turns into a parody of the traditional fairy tale. His masochistic pursuit of and ultimately victimization by an unreachable, illusory dream seduces, nourishes and ultimately destroys him. The lack of empathy of the age reaches its peak after Gatsby dies and Mr. Klipspringer calls asking for his tennis shoes.

Equally unwilling to completely embrace the transformations brought by the present is the British upper class, still rooted in its traditions. As Zwerdling states, "[the] sense of living in the past, of being unable to take in or respond to the transformations of the present, makes the governing class in *Mrs. Dalloway* seem hopelessly out of step with its time" (123). The

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upper class desires to preserve its position at the top of the old social order. One important scene which illustrates the patriotism and the pride that Clarissa feels is the passing of the royal car through London. For Clarissa, greatness is conspicuous all around while being in the presence of royalty. The behaviour of the subjects changes and the loyalty that they exhibit is reminiscent of that of their ancestors. It is only natural to notice about the post-war microcosm of the British governing class that there is "something inflexible, unresponsive, or evasive in their nature that makes them incapable of reacting appropriately to the critical events of their time or of their own lives" (Zwerdling 122). Despite the changes that go all around, the governing class is incapable of adapting and insists upon maintaining traditions.

The description of Miss Parry's eye that Peter Walsh offers turns into a symbol for the entire class. The prudish maiden aunt interested in botany who enforces the restrictive Victorian rules of social behaviour is now half blind. She reminds of an age that Peter himself considers on the verge of extinction:

> He had heard of her, from Clarissa, losing the sight of one eye. It seemed so fitting – one of nature's masterpieces – that old Miss Parry should turn to glass. She would die like some bird in a frost gripping her perch. She belonged to a different age, but being so entire, so complete, would always stand up on the horizon, stone-white, eminent, like a lighthouse marking some past stage on this adventurous, long, long voyage […]. (*Mrs. Dalloway* 162)

Not only the old aunt but other respectable members of high society become targets of critique. According to Ames, "[a] good portion of the party scene is devoted to mocking the presumption and stateliness of Clarissa's most prominent guests" (93). The party has as guests numerous important people, such as the Prime Minister. He is described as a very ordinary person despite his high rank and position, but his presence causes quite a stir. The audacity and stateliness of the most prominent guests is mocked through the description of the epicurean Hugh Whitbread, the sophisticated Lady Burton or Sir Harry "who had produced more bad pictures than any other two Academicians in the whole of St. John's Wood" (*Mrs. Dalloway* 175). Thus, both novels become vehicles of an extended social critique. The parties appear to be rather a wake than a celebration, a final farewell to a lifestyle facing effacement.

By drawing an analogy between F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, this article has examined the social and ideological atmosphere succeeding the Great War in the twinned cultural capitals of London and New York. The two remarkably parallel texts portray the microcosms of the British and American upper (middle) class, mapping the symbiotic relationship between the protagonists and their surroundings. With the advent of the modern age, innovation and emancipation are accompanied by a sense of alienation and disillusionment generated by the trauma of the war. The retreat of the protagonists into the past world of romantic imagination or into the present of exuberant parties proves to be futile. Any attempt to dream is smothered by the pragmatism of the modern age. Both novels provide a social critique of the pompous lifestyle of the upper (middle) class by depicting their flaws in the context of an affectless, materialistic society in which technology and humanity merge to the extent that machines become interconnected with agency and identity.

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