

THE GREAT WAR REFLECTIONS ON F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE GREAT GATSBY*

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Abstract

America's wars and American dream have been the source of an important body of literature for many of the nation's major writers. It is because of the fact that American nation is regarded as a nation that made by war and American dream is regarded as the most important determinant that shaped American identity. American nation is always guided by fulfillment, expansion and democracy. However, wars especially the Great War that Americans marched into idealistically have a great impact on perception of these concepts.

The Great War has two important outcomes as I examined in my paper: the emergence of commodity culture and fall of American dream. It is especially The Great War because before it began, Americans have a great faith in democracy, peace and prosperity or any institution that will bring them fulfillment. Americans marched idealistically into war, but they didn't get the kind of war they desired or expected, what they got was a war in which there was fatigue, disease, and millions of deaths; in which the fighting and individual effort was an utter futility. So, the result was devastating for American nation because pre-war American ideals were destroyed forever. After The Great War the aimless lives and escapist activities of postwar generation in their lostness drama reflect their disillusionment and loss of faith in every institution that will bring them fulfillment whereas this postwar condition of the nation has been portrayed in post-war literary canon. Their excessive alcohol consumption, distant and strange kind of love for each other, consumerist lifestyle and mostly vicious relationships compose most of their daily activities. They are a lost generation whose unique aim is to seize the day through escapist activities, because they lost their faith in future. On the other hand this sense of aimlessness turns into a life style and they consume to prove their presence because the most important outcome of the Great War is the commodity culture emerged in the aftermath of war. As *The Great Gatsby* reflects the gap between low and high classes of the society generated and deepened by commodity culture, and how this social abyss transformed American society to destroy American ideals that cloaked their American dream forever.

Key words: The Great War, commodity culture, postwar nation, consumerist lifestyle, social abyss

I. Introduction

America's wars have been the source of an important body of literature and a theme for many of the nation's major writers. From the very beginning as Civil War, World War I and World War II had a profound impact on American society; the literary treatment of them continues to influence present concepts of war and its nature, war is such a concept that it might have been written about more than peace. The Civil War remains the nation's most costly conflict in terms of casualties and physical destructiveness. It ended slavery, created a new national identity, and set America on the road to industrial domination of the western world. The war also provoked a great deal of writing, mainly histories, biographies, and memoirs; some of them depicted the gloriousness of war but some criticized the severity of war. The literary realists of the post-Civil War era like Stephen Crane offer horrifying view of the Civil War. In his *Red Badge of Courage*, with his true-to-life description, Crane criticizes the representation of ultimate test of manhood through war. It was terrible and frightening but still a mean of proving one's worth, this point of view was an important incentive for Americans who marched idealistically into World War I.

The Civil War was severe; however the impact of World War I was too severe for not only American nation but for human being. The meaning and glorious nature of war was redefined by the catastrophic outcomes of wars, so really changed. Stanley Cooperman states in his book that during the early part of the twentieth century, war was considered by many to be a grand and glorious thing. This perception played an important part in the literary response to World War I. Shortly after war broke out in Europe in 1914, the reality and severity of war disrupted existing image of war. It became evident that such a conflict had never taken place before. Before World War I

began, in America there was a great faith in democracy: in its capacity for material perfection and social justice, and its ability to generate the reforms that would pave the way to a golden era. Such faith created the expectation of peace and prosperity. Americans marched idealistically into war, but they didn't get the kind of war they desired or expected, what they got was a war in which there was fatigue, disease, and millions of deaths; in which the fighting was an utter futility. So, the result was inevitable: the pre-war American ideals were destroyed forever (Cooperman, 93). The first use of chemical bombs in World War I increased the devastating effects of war, and made it clear that the real war setting was no longer an arena to test manhood. World War I was mostly centered in Europe, millions of people including civilians died as a result of the war. It was one of the deadliest conflicts in history paving the way for major political changes, including revolutions in many of the nations involved. The outcomes of World War I for American nation were far more devastating; most importantly although America stood more financially powerful; American idealism that framed American dream was devastated forever.

In the aftermath of catastrophic World War I, Europe had huge losses during wartime and was in a pathetic state after four years of warfare, on the other hand America had emerged as one of the world's leading powers after the Treaty of Versailles. The outstanding outcome for American nation was economic prosperity in other words economic boom. These years which were called Roaring Twenties brought a "seize the day" generation together whose members were deeply influenced by war reality. They tried to compensate war loss with hedonistic and aimless life style. It is important to note that "seize the day" generation was the generation whose members participated in World War I as veterans; whose women waited their brothers, husbands, fathers, or boyfriends, without knowing how were they, or one day they would come or not or witnessed their death at the other side of the telegram. As I stated above the fall of American idealism is both a direct and indirect result of war, because the commodity culture that emerged after the Great War created an unrestrained desire for money in postwar America and doubled social and moral decay. American nation as a whole experienced the life that commodity culture paved the way for after war. They broke the bonds of old generation and tried to "seize the day," their unique aim is to consume to reinforce their presence; compensate absence of their ideals that formed the core of American dream of nation which had already wounded during the war. By the way, postwar condition, economic, social and political changes on individuals led them to think future gloomily and hopelessly and most importantly made young generation began to question whether peace was possible in the near future or not, this gloomy atmosphere as I stated above turned them into "seize the day" generation of postwar era. As John Clellon Holmes states in his essay: "[I]t is a postwar generation, and, in a world which seems to mark its cycles by its wars...Its symbols were the flapper, the flask of bootleg whiskey, and an attitude of desperate frivolity best expressed by the line: 'Tennis, anyone?' It was caught up in the romance of disillusionment, until even that became an illusion" (Holmes, 111).

II. *The Great Gatsby's Implications on Post-war values of American nation*

The war effect on individuals or on society as a whole during post-World War I period is conveyed by Lost Generation who appeared after the Great War and reflected the sense of loss or trauma through different experimental literary works, especially lacking of optimism. In my paper I will especially focus on the outcomes of World War I on American literary movements, and how modern writers depicted these outcomes through hedonistic life style and commodity culture, aroused after war that paved the way for the fall of American dream. My focus will be on these two recurring theme of American literature, because of the fact that America is regarded as a country that made by war; and American dream is regarded as a determinant that shaped American identity. So these themes have been widely written about in American literary canon.

After World War I, the Americans who marched idealistically into the war, disappointed with the outcomes of that war. After war most of the intellectuals decided to move Europe and settle there, because some of them were the war veterans. They took part in the war and lived that disappointing experience in which fighting was futile and the outcome was far away the faith in democracy. This sense of loss and lamentation became main themes of modern writings in early twentieth century. Gertrude Stein, an American author who spent most of her adult life in Europe, called all young people who served in the war as "lost generation." Ernest Hemingway used it as one of the epigraphs to his early novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. With the success of that book, the phrase is used as the label for the group of writers, who had been born near the turn of the century and reached maturity during World War I. This generation included distinguished artists such as Hemingway himself, F. Scott Fitzgerald, T. S. Eliot, Thomas Wolfe and John Dos Passos. Shen Jingnan suggests in his article that those intellectuals "who had personally took part in the war, only to find the war a catastrophe and the so-called 'crusade for purity and democracy' nothing but a political fraud, became disgusted with war, perplexed and confused for the future" (Shen, 1728). They often took the

form of exile and expatriation, settled down in Europe; Paris was the prime city in which the bohemian Lost Generation chose to wander. As Holmes states in his essay about:

The Lost Generation was discovered in a roadster, laughing hysterically because nothing meant anything anymore. It migrated to Europe, unsure whether it was looking for the 'orgiastic future' or escaping from the 'puritanical past.'... It was caught up in the romance of disillusionment, until even that became an illusion (Holmes, 111).

Holmes argues how Lost Generation felt after catastrophic World War I and how they were disillusioned with the outcomes of war. The sense of lamentation, disillusionment, the sense of loss pervade in modern writings of writers such as T. S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. This generation played in "its drama of lostness" and Eliot's *The Waste Land* took the statement to the core that the cohesion and harmony of things had disappeared in post-war era. Not only in Eliot's poem but also in Fitzgerald's or Hemingway's narratives the objectless sense of loss pervaded. Lost Generation was mostly occupied with the loss of faith and questioned the meaning of life and searched for the reasons why to live in such a world. In my paper my major focus will be on how Fitzgerald, war veteran himself, shed light on the lives or minds of Americans who fought in Europe during war, and the experience they have had in the years following their return through his major work *The Great Gatsby*. To empower my argument I will refer to Eliot's *The Waste Land* as Fitzgerald referred in his work and also Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* briefly. *The Waste Land* is the setting for "seize the day" generation of the Roaring Twenties; the generation who lost their ideals in the aftermath of war made these years roar in the romance of postwar period for the pursuit of pleasure and materialistic means to compensate that loss. The war service of Lost Generation writers was not central to their stories; however their insights of postwar era are more valuable for the reader and make the stories more believable and effective.

I stated the war effects on American individuals and intellectuals above during postwar period when a generation was created by postwar conditions that made these years roar. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* shed light upon the individuals' minds through their protagonists Gatsby and Jake; and explore the origins and fate of postwar American ideals. Jake's impotent condition, his aimless life and loss of faith; as well as Gatsby's unrestrained desire for money and consumerist life style clearly reflect the postwar condition of America. As I stated above my major focus will be on Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, and as a war veteran his postwar life experience and dream. *The Great Gatsby*, with all its implications and contradictions, is regarded as a cornerstone that deals with post war experience of Americans and the corruption of moral and social values. *The Great Gatsby* reflects the gap between low and high classes of the society generated and deepened by commodity culture, and how this social abyss transformed American society to destroy American ideals that cloaked their American dream forever. In essence, *The Great Gatsby* shed light on the decaying values of the newly emerging "nouveau riche" class who worshipped holy capitalist economy and make money the upsurging power of the period. Even dreams that seem romantic at first glance are revolving around the upsurging power of money. When money is allowed to predominate or persist over conscious mind, it zips individual's minds and makes them submissive to the destruction of ideals as we witnessed in post-war America. It is obvious that money is the power that defines the moral sentiments of modern societies as Engels stated in 1845:

"[t]he middle classes in England have become the slaves of the money they worship. They really believe that all human beings [...] and indeed all living things and inanimate objects have a real existence only if they make money or help to make it. Their sole happiness is derived from gaining a quick profit. They feel pain only if they suffer a financial loss" (Engels, 312, 311).

In fact Fitzgerald with his masterpiece laments on the destruction of American ideals reinforcing the growing social abyss between classes and how this abyss is deepening by immoral or criminal actions. To Fitzgerald the hedonist and consumerist life styles define the new horizons of modern culture and this symbolizes the fall of American idealism. *The Great Gatsby* reflects that modernity is so poisonous and fatal that America surrendered to capitalism, commodity, unrestrained desire and greed for money and status and left no room to any idealism including American dream. However the thing important to note that what is a dream? Is it an ideal or a deception? It is clear that Fitzgerald depicts dream through unrestrained desire for money and Daisy character whose voice "full of money" is important to infer the meaning of dream and ideal in postwar America and Gatsby's fabricated past adds to this dream a sense of deception. To make it clear, at the end of the novel fall of Gatsby with his set of false ideals that founded on a deceptive past symbolizes the fall of the American ideals that cloaked American dream.

To deepen my argument, I'd like to start with the concept of American dream. The American dream is a recurring theme in American literature that dates back to early colonial writings. It is defined as the belief that every man, without considering his origins, can pursue and attain his political and social goals. If the fact that American land is a land of opportunity is taken into consideration, this concept deserves its place in American canon to encourage individual entrepreneurs. This concept turned into a myth and it embodied different incentives for

different groups. For instance, to Puritans the American dream was spiritual fulfillment; to Jefferson, was the pursuit of happiness and base for political fulfillment of a perfect man; to Franklin, was the guide of self-made man; idealized in “rags-to-riches” narratives written by Horatio Alger. Besides, Whitman articulates the American dream of living in an ideal society in which all are honored and each is free to pursue liberty, life and happiness, he celebrates American landscape and American nation as a whole. As I noted the American dream was mythicized as the origin and handbook for spiritual, political and economic fulfillment. It is clear that American dream is a continuing defining characteristic of American nation and its people. It is disguised in many concepts and behaviors; however it is too optimistic to be attained under all its disguises.

The predecessors of American nation defined American dream and hoped it would encourage American nation to fulfill their spiritual, political and economic goals. They set Manifest Destiny to encourage the nation to expand; and American dream to attain spiritual, political, economic fulfillment. However American dream has been an abiding subject also the deepest problem in American narratives. It is because of the fact that it is too optimistic to be attained in all its disguises, so American literature has been mostly oppositional. In early nineteenth century when American nation was said to be living its Golden Age and fulfilling American dream, we come across many oppositional literary works by Twain or Hawthorne revealing and criticizing this paradox.

In the twentieth century, we also have modern writers who severely criticize mythical American dream, and it is clear that their understanding of the American dream differentiate from their predecessor's. It is clear that American dream is not a personal matter or a nostalgic romantic possibility but a continuing defining characteristic of American nation and its people. American dream is defined differently in different periods; its meaning is changed by the social, economic and political developments. The commodity culture and “seize the day” generation created by post-war condition in the twentieth century wasted American ideals, morality and dream as it is articulated by Eliot in his *Waste Land*. The land of opportunities is described as a desolate land, and this description really differs from Whitman's *The Song of Myself*, in which Whitman celebrates American land. With grand, sweeping descriptions of a diverse, democratic society, he articulates the American dream of living in an ideal society in which all are honored and each is free to pursue liberty, life and happiness. However, the celebrated land was depicted as a waste land, wasted by postwar condition in America. The aimless lives and escapist activities of postwar generation in their “lostness drama” reflect their disillusionment and loss of faith in every institution that will bring them fulfillment. Their excessive alcohol consumption, distant and strange kind of love for each other, consumerist lifestyle and mostly vicious relationships compose most of their daily activities. Hemingway describes a couple that share a very strange and distant kind of love for each other, he showed the aimless lives of the expatriates, and expressed the anti-war emotion in *The Sun Also Rises*. The protagonist, Jake Barnes who is left impotent during World War I, keeps his relationship and stand watching Lady Ashley's debauchery. They fill their time with escapist activities, such as drinking, dancing and debauchery. The inclusion of car into their life increased their mobility so they believe that change of location will fill the void senses in their life. However Jake is aware that he can't get away from himself by moving from one place to another. In fact Jack demonstrates a unique insight of the postwar generation. They spent their time partying in one place or another, but remain sorrowful and unfulfilled. Hence their drinking and dancing is just a futile distraction, a purposeless activity of an aimless life. The proclaimed “crusade war” destroys the generation's world both mentally and physically (Shen, 1728). About his postwar life experience the only thing Jake was curious was how to live in this postwar reality, he confessed that “I didn't care what it was all about. All I wanted to know was how to live in it” (Hemingway, 148). It is important to note that war service is not central to the story however Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is a valuable work to empower my argument on the fall of American ideals and morality that composed the core of American dream. Postwar experience of war veterans and especially the impotent and aimless situation of the protagonist Jake make this story more believable and effective to grasp postwar condition of America during Roaring Twenties.

These similar patterns of futile distractions and aimless activities are definitely available in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*; however my main argument in this book is commodity culture that brought along with the soared economy in postwar America and how the emergence of commodity culture resulted in the fall of American dream and idealism after World War I. In fact, Fitzgerald was associated with the concept of American dream more than any other writer of the twentieth century. Fitzgerald's depiction of American dream lacks of optimism and fulfillment so it really differs from his predecessor's depiction. Self-made man of “rags-to-riches” narratives was replaced by *Great Gatsby* with all his properties that were easily made in postwar America.

Tanfer Emin Tunç states in her article that *The Great Gatsby* is a microcosm through which Fitzgerald comments on the fall of American dream in 1920s. “Using Jay Gatsby to exemplify the rise and fall of American dream, Fitzgerald's novel traces the arc of a life as it begins in wonder, reaches for the stars, confronts society's spiritual emptiness and gratuitous materialism and ends in tragic death” (Tunç, 67). Throughout *The Great Gatsby*

our narrator Nick searches for moral attention: "I felt that I wanted the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (Fitzgerald, 3). He connects the war with his cynical, guilty disapproval of the New York and all he finds is moral decay of Long Island. During the Roaring Twenties especially among the war veterans returned from World War I the sense of disillusionment pervaded; on the other side cynicism and disaffection were fashionable especially among the culturally elite. With the pervasion of cynicism and disillusionment Long Island stands for the moral and social situation of American land as a whole with its East and West Egg with depiction of valley of ashes as a desolate land that separated these two coasts from each other. East Egg represents aristocratic, sophisticated and refined members of America; on the other side West Egg is the residential area where "nouveau riche" inhabits. However as a whole, from east to west, American nation is living in the world of deceptions where everyone is another to someone and nothing to himself. It is clear that the moral attention that Nick is looking for is replaced by deceptions. However, as Nick states in this morally disordered world "[o]nly Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction" (Fitzgerald, 3). With his "extraordinary gift for hope and romantic readiness" Gatsby was the embodiment of American dream in the Roaring Twenties; in fact with all his efforts he was a dream after a dream. Jay Gatsby is victimized in a potential tragedy of passionately idealizing an unworthy subject in a world which is not in uniform anymore, he is unquestionably obsessed with his past and craved to recreate the past just as it was. He fell in love with Daisy when he was in the army in Louisville, his lieutenant's uniform like a cloak disguised his penniless situation and he achieved to seduce her. Because of his love for Daisy, Gatsby "did extraordinarily well in the war" (Fitzgerald, 96). He might have had a pioneering future in politics or in aviation or advertising if Daisy had stayed true to her love for Gatsby. Instead, impatient to shape her life Daisy made her decision according to the chances at hand by "some force - of love, of money, of unquestionable practicality - that was close at hand" (Fitzgerald, 96). Daisy's pursuit of happiness in the form of her uncertain romantic love for Gatsby surrenders to safe, material union with Tom Buchanan. Afterwards, Gatsby encounters that situation and grasps the fact that to win Daisy he has to gather money and property in the quick and illegal ways that will take him to Meyer Wolfsheim and the rackets. He is so fascinated with his romantic past that his past became his unique future dream. He refashions himself, changes his name from James Gatz to Jay Gatsby who was claimed to be an Oxford man with a staged British accent. Gatsby tries to found his future on a nonexistent, imaginary past:

His right hand suddenly ordered divine retribution to stand by. "I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West-all dead now. I was brought up in America but educated at Oxford, because all my ancestors have been educated there for many years. It is a family tradition" (Fitzgerald, 42).

He fabricated a past which is non-existent, and through his imaginary past he tries to attain his future dream. In fact his dream is so innocent; however his criminal means and his goal Daisy are not as innocent as Gatsby's dream. To make sure of his past Gatsby continues:

My family all died and I came into a good deal of money. After that I lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe-Paris, Venice, Rome,-collecting jewels, chiefly rubies, hunting big game, painting a little, things for myself only, and trying to forget something very sad that had happened to me long ago (Fitzgerald, 42).

All his efforts as Gatsby stated were for erasing the fact that Daisy had left him for the sake of Tom's property. He craves to erase only this fact but on the other hand live that romance in Louisville just as it was. Even the idea of Daisy's leaving from her house in Louisville adds a "melancholy beauty" for Gatsby to his idea of this city (Fitzgerald, 97). Gatsby mythicized the absence of Daisy and fascinated with her absence. He couldn't realize that his fascination with Daisy is grounded not on real love but in deceptive memoir of their romance in Louisville. Nick states that:

He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could once return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was...(Fitzgerald, 71).

Gatsby's fascination is to recreate their past. Nick reacts to his thought about recreating the past. "'Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!' He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand. 'I am going to fix everything just the way it was before,' he said, nodding determinedly. 'She'll see'" (Fitzgerald, 71). He fabricated a past that he wished it had been, he accumulated so many properties, to provide the feeling of safety that Tom provided to Daisy to recreate the past just as it was before. He was aware of the fact that Daisy left him for the safety that property provided her. His non-existent past and all his materialistic consumption and accumulation such as "his piles of silk shirts, ostentatious car, extravagant mansion, and library full of unread books" are the outcomes of his efforts to repeat the past. To Gatsby his fabricated past and all of these possessions are his status symbols, and he accumulates all of them to prove his

presence to Daisy. However, the more he consumes and accumulates, Gatsby's romantic dream is getting further from him; on the contrary brings him closer to his bitter end. Gatsby's optimism and obsession with past is destroying his future forever, his end is coming gradually:

He took out a pile of shirts and began throwing them, one by one before us, shirts of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel which lost their folds as they fell and covered the table in many-colored disarray. While we admired [them] he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher—shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange with monograms of Indian blue. Suddenly, with a strained sound, Daisy bent her head into the shirts and began to cry stormily (Fitzgerald, 59).

As Tunç states in her article Daisy's cry with passion, when she encounters with the piles of silk shirts "foreshadows Gatsby's eventual demise" (Tunç, 73).

The rush for property and consumption is a tradition that came along with the outcomes of World War I. During the Roaring Twenties "the pursuit of happiness" ends up in pursuit of property and unrestrained desire for money as a result of soared economy as conveyed by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*. That were the years not only pursuit of happiness was replaced by pursuit of property, but also self-made man was replaced by "nouveau riche" whose money was all easily made. For instance, Prohibition Act of 1920 made many bootleggers easily millionaires, including Jay Gatsby. Franklin's self-made men surrendered to bootleggers and rackets. Gatsby, ironically, was the spokesman for that period, with his ironical dream. His failure alludes to the decline of the American dream myth and make American nation face with American dream reality; the reality that transformed from pursuit of fulfillment into pursuit of pleasure. The chaos and violence of World War I were reflected during Jazz Age and this reflection revealed how the generation that fought the war turned to wild and extravagant living to compensate. As a result Fitzgerald positions the characters of *The Great Gatsby* as emblems of these social trends: decayed social and moral values, decadent parties, wild Jazz music, excessive alcohol consumption and unrestrained desire for money and pleasure. The American dream was originally about discovery, individualism and the pursuit of happiness that were all celebrated by American predecessors however easy money, relaxed values and disillusionment with life itself corrupted this dream.

World War I had a great impact on the corruption of American moral values. They questioned life and the reasons to live in such a world where faith is lost. The issue of loss faith is the main argument of post-war writers and Jay Gatsby with his fabricated past and lost future is the summary of postwar condition of America. Jay Gatsby dazzles with all his properties; with his Rolls-Royce and huge mansion, and lavish parties full of chatter and laughter where "a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquor was served in glasses bigger than finger - bowls." His female guests, too young to know one from another, dance individualistically; but in the middle of these enthusiastic meetings they never know each other's name. "They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park" (Fitzgerald, 27). Gatsby's parties reveal the social situation in which American nation experienced their time. The excessive alcohol consumption, their continuous but aimless mobility and their foreignness to each other convey their disillusioned and aimless experiences in a world where everyone is another to someone and nothing to himself. The young population of these parties who excessively consume themselves is the most important issue to be reinforced to reveal the postwar condition of America. Among this huge crowded Gatsby is the man whose deepest loneliness flows inside his mansion from his windows visibly becomes clear after his parties, and reveals his complete isolation. Nick also states that "[a]t the enchanted metropolitan twilight I felt a haunting loneliness sometimes, and I felt it in others" (Fitzgerald, 37). Here, in modern America metropolitans are full of loneliness in huge crowds who are cynical to each other and disillusioned with life.

All his anonymous guests rumor about Gatsby:

Well, they say he is a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's. That's where all his money comes from...I'm scared of him. I'd hate to have him get anything on me...Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once...It's more that he was a German spy during the war...It couldn't be that, because he was in the American army during the war...(Fitzgerald, 22,29).

There are many preconceptions about who Gatsby is; in fact he is a "nouveau riche" in the West Egg of Long Island. Gatsby, with his entire consumerist tendency, material excess and unrestrained desire for money, is the representative of this newly emerging society, acquired their wealth from bootlegging, bribing, and organizing crimes. Fitzgerald reflects the moral deterioration of "nouveau riche" Americans who made their fortune from the booming years of America and "lived like Gilded Age robber barons" (Tunç, 69). As Nick draws attention to the conversations "on bonds or insurance or automobiles," of the Englishmen who "talk in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans...They were at least agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced

that it was theirs for a few words in the right key” during Gatsby’s parties (Fitzgerald, 28). It is clear that nation is after easy money and they can’t help their unrestrained desire for money. World War I made the way for easy money and shattered the faith in individual effort that had been persistent since the Industrial Revolution; however postwar generation understood that individual effort was futile during World War I. They no longer care about common sense and moral determination to struggle for money, it is because of the fact that individual effort is no longer counted and a man could not rise by his own efforts in postwar America. I mean Horatio Alger’s rags-to-riches individuals who have common sense and moral determination surrendered to bootleggers who valued the opportunities that arose with the Prohibition Act of 1920. In fact Gatsby’s self-improving schedule seemed to be derived from Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* where every task had its own time from rising from bed to practicing elocution. He set some resolves for himself and as his father states at his funeral “Jimmy was bound to get ahead...he has got about improving his mind” (Fitzgerald, 110). World War I shattered this vision that every individual could rise by his own efforts, because individuals had been already disillusioned by the encounter with futile individual effort during war. Even after war the economic and social conditions created more aimless and purposeless generation whose only dream is to “seize the day.”

After World War I American economy brought prosperity to almost every individual, American nation is prosperous; however Tunç states that Gatsby like all other “nouveau riche,” is prosperous however they couldn’t get rid of their “peasantry.” For instance, Gatsby is “flashy” with his pink suits, gaudy shirts, Rolls-Royce. Despite all their marked wealth, the “nouveau riche” is cheap materialistic imitations of old taste of East Egg of Long Island. They would never acquire the taste of them, Daisy Buchanan who is “gleaming like silver, safe and proud above the hot struggles of the poor,” will always remain a dream to them. Daisy will never care Gatsby and sacrifice her safety and prosperity that Tom provided her for the sake of Gatsby’s romantic love. As she did five years ago, Daisy chooses Tom over Gatsby again after Myrtle’s accident. On the other hand, as the representatives of aristocratic and refined members of the East Egg, Tom and Daisy like others are cruel and indifferent. Nick states that “[t]hey were careless people, Tom and Daisy - they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made...” (Fitzgerald, 114).

“The valley of ashes presided over by the ubiquitous Dr. T. J. Eckleburg” is depicted as desolate as T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (Fitzgerald, 15). In fact the valley of ashes where upper and lower classes of society come together is not only the emblem of lower class but also the emblem of desolate American land as a whole which was a land of opportunities once. The presence of valley of ashes in this book is deliberately used to reflect unrestrained desire to move to an upper class and have status through Myrtle character. As I stated above the gap between lower and upper classes of the society generated and deepened by commodity culture, also created a group of people who craves to jump to upper class to have a prosperous life. It is because of the fact that commodity culture defines success as getting out of poverty and rising to prosperity in quick - illegal or immoral- ways. Gatsby’s aim is also the same as Myrtle’s; his unique obsession is to belong to Daisy Buchanan’s class at whatever cost. The social class to which Daisy belong, is one of the most important thing that idealize Daisy in the eyes of Gatsby. So richness or prosperity is a mean to reach Daisy for Gatsby. However the thing that makes Gatsby more sympathetic than Myrtle for the reader is his obsession to his youth romance in Louisville and his inability to grasp the difference between this romance and reality; this differentiates Gatsby not only from Myrtle but all other characters in the book as Nick stated at the beginning of the novel. Gatsby’s romantic idealism and passion to recreate the past as well as his rise to upper class as a “nouveau riche,” his mysterious past and financial power idealize Gatsby for Nick who is also a member of Lost Generation. As Nick stated, “it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person” (Fitzgerald, 4).

III. Conclusion

To conclude my paper, I assert above that war and American dream themes are recurring themes of American literature. It is because of the fact that American nation is regarded as a nation that made by war and American dream is regarded as the most important determinant that shaped American identity. American nation is always guided by fulfillment, expansion and democracy. However, wars especially the Great War that Americans marched into idealistically have a great impact on perception of these concepts. The Great War has two important outcomes as I examined above: the emergence of commodity culture and fall of American dream. It is especially The Great War because before it began, Americans have a great faith in democracy, peace and prosperity or any institution that will bring them fulfillment. Americans marched idealistically into war, but they didn’t get the kind of war they desired or

expected, what they got was a war in which there was fatigue, disease, and millions of deaths; in which the fighting and individual effort was an utter futility. So, the result was devastating for American nation because pre-war American ideals were destroyed forever. After The Great War the aimless lives and escapist activities of postwar generation in their “lostness drama” reflect their disillusionment and loss of faith in every institution that will bring them fulfillment. Their excessive alcohol consumption, distant and strange kind of love for each other, consumerist lifestyle and mostly vicious relationships compose most of their daily activities. They are a lost generation whose unique aim is to “seize the day” through escapist activities, because they lost their faith in future. On the other hand this sense of aimlessness turns into a life style and they consume to prove their presence because the most important outcome of the Great War is the commodity culture emerged in the aftermath of war. As *The Great Gatsby* reflects the gap between low and high classes of the society generated and deepened by commodity culture, and how this social abyss transformed American society to destroy American ideals that cloaked their American dream forever. In essence, *The Great Gatsby* shed light on the decaying values of the newly emerging “nouveau riche” class who worshipped holy capitalist economy and make money the upsurging power of the period. Even dreams that seem romantic at first glance are revolving around the upsurging power of money. When money is allowed to predominate or persist over conscious mind, it zips individual’s minds and makes them submissive to the destruction of ideals as we witnessed in post-war America. I especially refer to Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* as the social emblems of post-World War I period. As I stated above Fitzgerald, war veteran himself, shed light on the lives or minds of Americans who fought in Europe during war, and the experience they have had in the years following their return.

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Biography

She is an English lecturer at School of Foreign Languages, Fırat University/Turkey. She was a volunteer research assistant at Ministry of Foreign Affairs Center for Strategic Research in 2008 summer. She joined Istanbul Aydın University’s English Language and Literature department as a Ph. D. candidate in 2013 after completing her B. A. in American Culture and Literature at Hacettepe University. Her current research interests involve theories of the novel, literary realism and cultural materialism including both British and American novels.

