

Class Critique in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*
and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

By Diana Raluca Aftenie



Master's Thesis Department of Foreign Languages
University of Bergen
November 2015

*I express my deeply gratitude to my supervisor, **Laura Sætveit Miles**. Thank you
for your constructive criticism and for your patience and understanding!*

Table of contents

Table of contents.....	2
Abstract	3
Introduction.....	4
I. Class Critique in Terms of Money in <i>The House of Mirth</i> and <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	
1. Money and Its Influence in <i>The House of Mirth</i>	13
2. <i>The Great Gatsby</i> and the Social Importance of Money.....	30
3. Comparison. Money: Same Dangers, Different Circumstances in <i>The House of Mirth</i> and <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	46
II. The Class Hierarchy of Women and Its Critique in <i>The House of Mirth</i> and <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	57
1. Women’s Social Stability and Mobility in <i>The House of Mirth</i>	57
2. The Power of Women’s Social Class in <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	72
3. Comparison. Marriage, Wealth and Desire for Lily and Daisy... ..	89
Conclusions.....	103
Works cited.....	107

Abstract

Lucrarea de față este o comparație între *The House of Mirth* și *The Great Gatsby* și își propune să investigheze în ce măsură se prezintă o critică a claselor sociale în cele două romane. *The House of Mirth* a fost publicată în anul 1905, iar *The Great Gatsby* în 1925, contextul istoric al celor două prezentând diferențe semnificative. Edith Wharton și F. Scott Fitzgerald creează în romanele sale o societate în care comportamentul claselor sociale este demascat, o realitate în care personajele sunt expuse ca fiind preocupate doar de propriile interese.

Studiul este împărțit în două capitole: primul capitol stabilește care sunt asemănările dintre tehnicile celor doi scriitori de a introduce o critică de clasă prin intermediul banilor, iar al doilea observă modul prin care sunt construite personajele feminine astfel încât să devină niște instrumente pentru naratori în scopul creării criticii de clasă.

Relevanța unei cercetări de acest gen este indiscutabilă, întrucât niciun critic nu a mai fost preocupat de acest subiect, în măsura în care să realizeze o analiză exhaustivă prin care să demonstreze apropierea celor două romane din aceste puncte de vedere. Pe de altă parte, importanța discutării unei astfel de subiect mi se pare de necontestat, întrucât reprezintă o contribuție la profilul de ansamblu al criticii cu privire la cele două romane.

Introduction

My thesis argues that there are significant similarities between the ways that Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) contribute to a critique of prevailing class structures. I will refer to the techniques used by the authors to introduce the complicated relationships money involves and the difficulties met by women in a society in which men rule. Both novels develop a critique of American society at the beginning of the twentieth century, with differences that intervene due to the specific style and originality of the author, as to the period they have been written in and thus the period they have presented in the novels. These two works are a reflection of the society, of the period they are created in and the purpose of my study has been limited to an investigation of the way Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald introduce social class and the methods they use to criticize it. Such methods mostly concern the behavior of the characters and the way they relate to each other.

Firstly, *The House of Mirth* was published in 1905, and presents a society which was part of the American Gilded Age cultural background. It started in the nineteenth century and it ended approximately at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to researchers, it was an era with a lot of industrial and communication discoveries, like the radio, newspapers, telephone: "However, independence from direct political influence was achieved only by introducing a new business influence. The financial role of advertising shaped daily practices within the news industry and transformed the meaning of news for both producers and customers." (Croteau and Hoynes 2013, 67). There was a time of change, a time of growing and development. All fields were flooded with new inventions, new discoveries which were

meant to make the humans' life easier. These discoveries became a quick source of wealth for some and a quicker reason for the poor to become poorer.

Edith Wharton's family was a part of the high class society, so the author knew all about the customs of the elite. *The House of Mirth* is a novel of manners, in which society was stratified in classes, as I will explore in the following chapters, people being reluctant to change. Thus, the most important factors in the American society of the late nineteenth century, respectively, the beginning of the twentieth century, were the economic growth, the industrialization and the way society was divided. Wharton's novel dwells mostly on two of these subjects: money and the role it plays in society. Through the characters presented in the novel, Wharton criticizes New York's aristocracy, showing different behaviors that more or less paradigmatic. The lack of moral values, the fact that superficiality is one of the most striking elements regarding the wealthy people's behavior are noticed by the American author and illustrated as a criticized model of behavior.

Secondly, *The Great Gatsby* is published years later, in 1925, when the cultural environment had suffered great changes. In 1920, people who went to America found a different country as two amendments were put in effect. The first, prohibited the distribution by sale, the transportation or the manufacturing of alcohol. There were several associations which sustained this, among which *Women's Christian Temperance Union*, or the *Suffragettes*. Alcohol was considered to be a curse and it was thought that through its prohibition, there would be less crime, the family bond will be strengthened and the national character will be improved. The results were not the ones expected, as the economy went down. Jobs were lost, many restaurants could not survive without selling alcohol and closed and the producing and distribution of alcohol started illegally. Bootlegging brought people a lot of money, this all according to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of American Social History*

(2012). Fitzgerald explores this era and he also explores by the creating of the character Jay Gatsby, the business of illegally sold alcohol.

In *The Great Gatsby*, the author offers more freedom for women than Edith Wharton. For instance, women at the parties thrown by the main character in *The Great Gatsby* behave freely, without being embarrassed by anything. The traditions are more accentuated in *The House of Mirth*, as in *The Great Gatsby*, in which we encounter more often the not so strict conventions, but instead snobbery. So, Gatsby gets rich with bootlegging (Fitzgerald 2013, 172), corruption being a common in the 20's era as it was in the 1900, although through different means. The result is the same though: unorthodox methods are practiced so that money can be made. So, the cultural background of the twentieth century includes women constituting different classes, which are well exposed in both novels, especially the high-class women. They are not studied though by the critics as a separate group of the society, with a different role in society, different from men's. Although there are critics like James W. Gargano, who write about social class in *The House of Mirth*, they are referring to it generally, men and women together, without outlining the differences between the genders. Gargano, for instance affirms:

The calculating Bertha Dorset holds on to her fortune and her cowed husband, and the Brys and Rosedale are ready to pump their new-made millions into the perpetuation of a system that cruelly snubbed them. Goodness and the freedom to achieve it are commodities too fragile to survive in such a civilized social state. (Gargano 1972, 139)

Gargano specifies the society is a bad system which is created by people who are the same. There are too many compromises to be made in order to stay focused on the real values. Goodness and the freedom to gain it are defeated. Money is a mandatory asset which forms a society in which it becomes the most important. Without money one is unworthy to be part of

high society. Gargano has the proper arguments to support these affirmations but he does not focus on the subject of women as an independent group, as a separate group, which acts according to its own set of values. In the case of *The Great Gatsby*, it happens the same, women are not treated by researchers as a whole, as a class in which they have secret plans without men knowing about. For instance, Bertha plans to bring Lily on board of Sabrina, without her husband knowing she is used as a distraction so that his wife can cheat on him. How do high-class women relate to each other? How do they relate to lower-class women? These are important questions to which my thesis intends to answer in order to offer a better view of the way both Wharton and Fitzgerald explore the structure of the social classes in the novels.

Some of the critics who offer more attention to are Maggie Gordon Froehlich (in criticizing *The Great Gatsby*) and Jennie A. Kassanoff (in writing about *The House of Mirth*). They provide the same insight into both novels destined to show the world built in them is one based on money. The relations formed between people are not established through love, but through economic exchange. Froehlich believes that the road Nick takes is about making peace with the American society which is in those times determined by patriarchal capitalism in which there is almost no prospect for authentic love or desire, aside from the economic domain (Gordon Froehlich 2011, 210). The same idea is also expressed by Jennie A. Hassanoff, regarding *The House of Mirth*. The critic asserts that Wharton points out in the novel the fact that reaching 29 years old and still having not found a husband, makes Lily vulnerable to what Charlotte Perkins Gilman calls “the sexuo-economic relation” (Kassanoff 2000, 61). So, the researcher affirms that there is no relationship based on honesty for example. Based on this affirmation I believe it all revolves around money in the end. Both critics insist that in each novel, social classes are connected by money. In sum, then, their view is that a relationship between love and money is one in which if one gives something the

other has to receive. Gatsby wins a huge fortune in order for him to win Daisy. Tom has money so he gets Daisy to marry him. Everything is based on exchange in the world of the rich.

I agree with their assertions but in my view, they need to be completed with deeper research. For instance, their affirmations can be taken a step further, by saying that money is actually the only means and goal which matter both in *The Great Gatsby* and *The House of Mirth*. Yet, I would argue that things did not change once the law has, as appearances are deceitful. Berman points out exactly this type of difference, between appearances and essence: “There is an allegorical moment at Gatsby’s first party in which a chorine is singing: [...] It is a reminder about surfaces, and all of the metaphorical applications of the idea of surfaces” (Berman 2001, 91). The critic introduces as an example the moment of a song, played by a chorine during one of Gatsby’s parties: “One thing’s sure and nothing’s surer / The rich get richer and the poor get – children” (Fitzgerald 2013, 123). The lyrics are suggestions for the idea of surfaces, idea which basically signifies the appearances, the untrue, the mask. Overall, then, I believe that both novels explore the corrupt women American Society, which could not have been perceived as a whole if it were not for money.

The Great Gatsby is also a critic of the American Dream, which forms the belief all people can get rich, no matter their social status. However it is proved out to be merely an illusion, as the novel presents. Critics have argued the novel is severely criticizing the American Dream, as besides money, corruption interferes:

In stressing the corruption at the heart of Gatsby’s dream, as well as exposing, in the revelation of Daisy’s character, the tawdriness of what the dream aspires to, Fitzgerald clearly intended a fundamental criticism of the ‘American Dream’ itself and of the business society to which, in the twentieth century, it had become indissolubly wedded. (Millgate 1962, 336)

The critic mentions the American Dream is set to be lived by both Daisy and Gatsby. Although it is true that the way in which Gatsby makes his fortune is suggested to be illegal, and that Daisy marries Tom, a man she does not love, in order to gain money and social status, in my opinion, they are both living the American Dream. The critic argues the road Gatsby takes in getting rich is a bad one, and it is inspired by Daisy, but I also think Daisy lives this dream in wanting to get rich by marrying Tom. So her wish to live the American Dream is inspired by Tom and the same happens to Myrtle and Tom. There is a certain interpretation that Fitzgerald offers to the American Dream. In term of women, the author shows the fact, as opposed to Wharton, they can live it in a different way other than marrying a rich man. Jordan for instance is the exception from the rule. But she has to be famous and rich though in order to enjoy freely her life. So, what the critic does not state is that the American Dream is in *The Great Gatsby* a dream mainly to be lived by men.

Another difference between the cultural backgrounds of the periods the novels were written in, is the fact that at the beginning of the 1900s the social classes were clearly divided. In the 1920s the differences between classes are beginning to blur. Gatsby gets rich after being poor, having no name of some father with a long line of aristocrats. But although he succeeds in making a fortune, Daisy does not choose him over Tom, because of the latter's social position. On the other hand, Lily gets expelled from the high class because she has no money. So, the classes demand that one should have also besides a social status, money (in the case of Lily); and in the case of Gatsby, money without social status is not enough. In conclusion, things change at the surface, but they actually stay the same. Both in *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby*, money has to be guarded by social class, and the other way around.

There are many common features which prove hence that these two novels, *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* should be put together in a comparative study. By comparing

these novels from different times I can notice the changes that society came through and I can analyze the changed perspectives on women as a social class. I can also observe the prospects which stayed the same, like for instance the desired power brought by money. Both the characters from *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* are presented with a desire of being wealthy. There are few exceptions which are not presented as much in the novels. The characters which dominate the narrative scenes in the novels are those who search for ways of getting rich. I think my thesis is really important to the overview of the way through which class critique is realized in these novels.

Furthermore, there is no question about the fact that Fitzgerald was influenced by Edith Wharton as they were communicating. Fitzgerald sent Wharton a copy of *The Great Gatsby*, after its publication, and she answers through a letter dated “8 June 1925” (Donaldson 1984, 266). Besides her appreciative words “let me say at once how much I like Gatsby” (266), it seems it contained also a critique which explained why Gatsby is not really “great”:

[...] that to make Gatsby really Great, you ought to have given us his early career (not from the cradle – but from his visit to the yacht, if not before) instead of a short resume of it. That would have situated him, & made his final tragedy a tragedy instead of a “fait divers” for the morning papers. (Donaldson 1984, 266)

Millgate believes that it is inappropriate for Wharton to state this since she uses the same narrative omission (Millgate 1962, 338). Wharton mentions it in *The Custom of the Country* (Millgate 1962, 339) but I think it is present in *The House of Mirth* as well, since we do not find out so much about Lily’s past. By sending his novel to Wharton, Fitzgerald is in fact reaching back for an elder generation’s approval, maybe thinking that they were dealing with the same issues.

My thesis is divided in two main chapters, the first one being focused on the main means of corruption, money, and the second being about examining the social classes of the

female characters, especially the ones who are part of the high class. They are influenced by money just as men are, but one of the characteristics I discovered in both novels is that the narrators use the women characters for manipulation and intrigue more than they use men. Even if their thirst for obtaining money is as big as it is for men, they do not have other means to obtain it, other than inherit it or get it through marriage. Jordan is an exception but she is one among many more others.

Money is an important subject as it represents everything people aspire towards in the American society. There is no reality without money in the book. It creates one's image and this is proved with Lily herself. As she passes through all social classes, her image depends on how much money she has. It does not count she used to have a good name, a social position, all that matters is the money she has or has not. With Gatsby is the same. He is aware of the fact he cannot win Daisy without money. So, he gets rich, and then tries to win Daisy back. He is under the illusion money has infinite powers, like that of bringing the past back. Gatsby wants to relive the past with Daisy so he creates a strong link between himself and the money. Social class critique is created through all these relations that are conventional, being governed by social position and money. Also, the authors are using the characters' bad habits for criticizing the society. Its values do not depend on the moral views but on their personal interest.

To sum up, my thesis explores the way the critique class is built in the novels through the lengths of money which becomes so important in both works, that it ends governing the lives of the characters. It is a significant matter, although it always stays in the shadow in the critics' studies. Although they mention its important role, there has not been written a study yet dedicated to the subject. In addition to this, there is no critic, no researcher who has compared the two novels, regarding money, class and gender issues. There are mentions of it, or subjects which can be said to have a connection, like for instance Scott Donaldson's work,

Possessions in The Great Gatsby, which begins promisingly by expressing the fact that every character in the novel is what he or she wears and what he or she possesses: “One’s house, one’s clothes: they do express one’s self, and no one more than Jay Gatsby. It is in good part because of the clothes he wears that Tom Buchanan is able to undermine him as a competitor for Daisy” (Donaldson 2001, 188). This critic’s affirmations imply that Gatsby is the character who is mostly exposed because of his belongings. His clothes and his opulent house are significant for someone like Tom for instance to figure him out. The clothes Gatsby wears (the critic gives the example of the pink suit) enable Daisy’s husband to undermine him as a man capable of stealing Daisy away. So, the critic is focusing his study on what money can buy and on the image these material things create about people, and does not have money as the main object of study.

To sum it up, I think my thesis will bring a new fresh image over the way these two novels are perceived. It is presenting the way critique class is built and the importance which is placed on money even though twenty years had passed between these two novels. *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* are projections of a reality in which people succumb to the seduction money represents.

Class Critique in Terms of Money in *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby*

1. Money and Its Influence in *The House of Mirth*

In this chapter I will argue the implications of money in *The House of Mirth*. The novel describes the early twentieth century's American society in which money governs the way the characters act. Lily Bart is a woman who has been taught by her mother that the values of life are strictly tied to how much money one has. How is Lily's life influenced by money in the decisions she makes and what role does money have in all of the situations she is exposed? These questions are legitimate and I intend to answer them throughout my study. Also, I want to inquire whether the desire for money and implicitly Lily's behavior would change (and if so in what manner) the way she is perceived in the eyes of the upper class. Is the character of Lily evolving throughout the novel regarding the way she relates to money or does it remain the same? All of these questions are presented so that I can uncover the way Wharton realizes a class critique in the novel. The main character is Lily, who is an exception from the other characters. She gets to be a part of all social classes at a time, showing a social mobility throughout the novel. This gives the author the opportunity to control the way that each character's behavior is influenced by money, leading thus to a class critique.

After reading the studies of critics interested in the same subject, I have noticed only few of them were drawn to the subject. For instance, Maureen Howard is concerned more about the relationship between Lily and Selden and the way it is reflected in the society: "*The House of Mirth* is a novel of concealment and revelation, of what is presumed socially and

what must be discovered - morally and emotionally - by both of its principals, and what remains unknowable to them” (Howard 1995, 139). The main focus is the way the two characters, Lily and Selden, succeed in creating a story of “concealment and revelation”. The social part is also an attraction for the critic, because the characters form a diversified society in which critique and gossip are the main course.

Further on, in an article written by Leslie Backer, the point of interest is represented by Lily, which is presented by Wharton as both “an artist” and “an object”: “despite the constraints and frustrations of her existence, Lily ultimately transcends those barriers in her most public of artistic acts” (Backer 2010, 34). What Backer says is actually the fact that Lily fights against the unwritten rules of society. She fights against judgments and so she becomes a sort of heroine for the feminine gender.

Critics are also interested in studying the characters through other means than money. For instance, about Selden, Carol J. Singley argues whether he makes a good husband for Lily:

If Lily is the seeker of ideal love, then Lawrence Selden would appear to be her ideal partner; however, he is not. Despite his claim – ‘the only way I can help you is by loving you’ (222) – Selden fails Lily at every critical point. He assumes she is having an affair when he sees her leave the Trenor house late at night; he fails to head off Bertha’s attack aboard the *Sabrina* or intervene with the reporter afterward; and when Lily falls from social grace, he turns away from her hotel because she is registered with people he deems disreputable. (Singley 1995, 79)

According to Singley, Selden is a disappointment. I agree, to the extent that he does not support Lily and he most certainly does not make good material for a husband in a society with materialistic values. The critic is interested in discussing gender and class, more than the influence money has. On the other hand, Eileen Connell focuses on marriage and on the rights

of women: “Wharton explores some of the disastrous consequences of a marriage institution that is founded on spurious notions of a woman's place in society” (Connell 1997, 558). She focuses “on the ways in which Wharton represents the literary and cultural relations between Lily and the struggling lower-class women represented in the novel's margins” (Connell 1997, 558). So, Connell is interested in studying the way Lily succeeds in connecting with the other women from the lower class. She belongs to the upper-class, but once her money is wasted, she has to learn to adapt in a society in which money rules.

Furthermore, the critic who is concerned in the subject of money and the way it has an influence on the characters' life in the novel is Wai-Chee Dimock. She talks about the big role exchange has in the book, emphasizing not so much the role money has, but the moments involving the processes of giving and receiving. However, the critic's panorama lacks an interpretation based on how money influences the characters. I think the importance of such a study is mentionable, since it contributes to a better view of how the novel is built. I find it important to describe the complications which start developing once it is established that money govern the society described by Wharton.

A first statement would be the fact that Wharton emphasizes the way money controls everything and everyone. It is like an umbrella which covers all the characters. Wai-Chee Dimock writes:

The most brutal moment in *The House of Mirth* dramatizes not so much the centrality of sex as the centrality of exchange. Sexual favors are what Gus Trenor wants, but his demands are steeped in – and legitimated by – the language of the marketplace, the language of traded benefits and reciprocal obligations. Odious as it may seem, Trenor's speech merely asserts what everyone assumes. “Investments” and “returns”, “interests” and “payments”: these words animate and possess Wharton's characters, even in their world of conspicuous leisure. (Dimock 1985, 783)

To emphasize the climax of the cruelty exposed in the novel, a cruelty which is a necessary means when dealing with money as it will be proved later on, the critic comments upon the way characters use the “exchange”: it is the main point of focus, according to Dimock. I agree with the critic’s affirmation; if there is to take a closer look at the transition of the main character, Lily Bart, one can notice the fact the society in which she lives is based on the rules of giving and receiving. Dimock mentions the “exchange” Trenor demands for the money he had given to Lily, but this is not the only one. For instance, the discussions between Lawrence Selden and Lily about marriage have the theme of benefits and disadvantages of such a union. To be more specific, when Lawrence talks about proposing to Lily, she changes her voice tone, becomes serious and tells him she would be a great risk. By telling him “you know I am horribly poor” (Wharton 2008, 11), Lily basically admits her husband would be in the first place the man who would provide for her. Why is this the reply Selden gets? Because Lily knows, even though she is in pain because of it, that the world would judge their marriage. Why? Because the image she projects is all that matters. After all, she does say “I must know just what is being said of me” (Wharton 2008, 219). She cannot bring a good reputation out of the business of marrying Selden. She knows marriage is an exchange and she also knows she cannot bring much into this union.

To sustain my affirmation, I will also present Maureen Howard’s opinion on the subject: “Selden's first assessment of Lily Bart is in the nature of gossip. Throughout their story, insofar as it is ever *their* story, he will allow his estimate of her conduct to be adjusted by what is said of her” (Howard 1995, 143). So, the image someone projects is all that matters in the society described by Wharton. Lily’s beauty is an important quality for Selden but this is not enough for although he likes to look at her, to admire her features, he does not trust her. Lily’s behavior is judged by the other characters so the conclusion is that marriage means business in the novel. Selden brings the money, but Lily has to bring a good name. So,

Dimock is right when affirming that exchange is the main point of focus in the novel. To sustain this, I also want to mention Rosedale's second marriage proposal which is more of a bargain. Rosedale asks Lily to use the letters sent by Bertha to Selden to blackmail her into a reconciliation. In exchange he would marry her. As I said earlier, the image projected into the society is all that counts. Rosedale would never marry a woman who had fallen from the good graces of the society. He agrees to give her money, to maintain her (once he marries her) but she has to give him something back.

Which is the role of the money? Taking it a step forward than Dimock, I think money is one of the most important factors in the novel and this is the main character's pursuit. She wants to marry a man with a lot of money. It is not love that she is chasing, it is money. Finally, the art of doing an exchange is practiced throughout the book and money is the reason the exchange is unfolded, for Lily is the one who initiates it in many of the situations. Besides money, she cannot let go of other things she wants like happiness or freedom. That is why she refuses all men who propose to her; they try in one way or another to obstruct her freedom and as she does not love them, she cannot be happy into marrying them. Edith Wharton realizes a class critique through the lengths of the exchange, a process in which money is never absent. The author presents the way through which exchange takes place, being a technique in which money is the most necessary means.

Money means power in the world described by Wharton and it is a necessary means for Lily Bart and this can be applied to other characters as well. She pursues money; instead, the ones who already have money use it to obtain other things. Dimock also sustains this idea, but she says the novel is practically built around the need for exchange, mentioning everything can count as money in this process:

Everything has a price, must be paid for, just as – on the opposite end – everything can be made to “count as” money, to be dealt out and accepted in lieu of cash. Dispensed

in this manner, social gestures lose their initial character and figure only as exchange values: the dinner invitations, for Stepney and Rosedale, presumably have no meaning except as surrogate cash payments.” (Dimock 1985, 784)

It seems the others take advantage of the way Lily tries to ensure herself a good life. As Dimock affirms, I think almost all situations are put in the shadow of money. Lily expresses her wishes of marrying someone who can provide for her from the beginning of the novel, when she goes to Selden’s flat. All the following actions would automatically be set to continue on the same path. Her actions are a trigger for the way she is treated by the others. For instance, the fact she accepts Bertha’s invitation on the *Sabrina* (even though she knew Bertha was using her for distracting her husband George so she could cheat on him), got her thrown off the yacht in the end. As Bertha is not truly a friend for Lily, the situation gets worse, Lily being thrown out of the good graces of the high society too. There are many times when Lily is not presented as having the most honest intentions. She takes advantage of Bertha’s invitation to offer herself a rich sejour on the yacht, so she ignores the price she would have to pay for it. Bertha offers a rich life on the yacht, but in exchange she wants Lily to be a piece of decorum to which George would react so that his wife would be free to see another man. So, as Dimock says, everything has a price and money always plays an important part in all of these. This is really significant as it shows the intention of presenting a society which is guided by money and lacks the power of taking the important decisions in its absence.

By showing Lily’s actions, the author exposes the fact Lily is not ready to pay the price that is asked of her by society. And from the beginning of the novel, she projects the image of a wealthy, refined presence. She does not have the strength to live a life of misery and poverty. Having money means for Lily living her life. Once things take a bad turn, the character doesn’t know how to handle the situation, she gets a job as a milliner but that does

not work as she is not used with having a job and she is fired. The reader cannot see a Lily educated to survive without money; since Wharton unveils a part of Lily's past, details about her wealthy family are presented. She is an upper-class woman and she behaves like one even though the lack of money does not say this about her anymore. If one takes a look at the initial description of Lily, one can notice her own presence is a representation of a wealthy life:

As she moved beside him, with her long light step, Selden was conscious of taking a luxurious pleasure in her nearness: in the modeling of her little ear, the crisp upward wave of her hair – was it ever so slightly brightened by art? – and the thick planting of her straight black lashes. Everything about her was at once vigorous and exquisite, at once strong and fine. He had a confused sense that she must have cost a great deal to make, that a great many dull and ugly people must, in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce her. [...] and was it not possible that the material was fine, but that circumstance had fashioned it into a futile shape? (Wharton 2008, 7)

There is, right from the beginning of the novel, this image of Lily that emits luxury around her and it seems like she is only made for such a world, where she has to be admired; Dimock notes Selden's "luxurious pleasure" when near her. Comparing Lily to art, her features are way superior. "Her straight black lashes" and her other particularities were "exquisite" and "vigorous". Women are threatened by her beauty, whilst men are drawn to it. She is influenced by her family: her father, who lost their fortune, was most of the time away and this is a cause for Lily's inability to understand men; regarding her problems with money, she learned that from her mother, who also taught her the price of each thing and also what it means to have no money. Edith Wharton shows here that there is a problematic social construction regarding the gender and the struggle is always centered on money and the way it is perceived for Lily's road in the novel is surrounding the need for money. So, Lily has received an education which is not suited for her real situation.

In the observations above I studied the way Lily relates to money. This brings another question into discussion: in which way does she perceive money? By taking a look at the next paragraph, I see confusing phrases regarding the implications of money. It regards a discussion about success and freedom:

Selden pushed his hat back and took a side-glance at her. ‘Success – what is success? I shall be interested to have your definition’.

‘Success?’ She hesitated. ‘Why, to get as much as one can out of life, I suppose. It’s a relative quality, after all. Isn’t that your idea of it?’

‘My idea of it? God forbid!’ He sat up with sudden energy, resting his elbows on his knees and staring out upon the mellow fields. ‘My idea of success’, he said, ‘is personal freedom’.

‘Freedom? Freedom from worries?’

‘From everything – from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents. To keep a kind of republic of the spirit – that’s what I call success’.

(Wharton 2008, 67-8)

When it comes to money, Lily finds herself in a tense situation. She mostly describes her relationship with money in terms of freedom, Selden’s definition of success. When she has money and affords to pay her debts, she feels free; when she is overwhelmed by debts, she feels like a slave of the upper-class circles and their demands. In terms of gender, Lily cannot live a life full of freedom, as men do: for example Selden, who can have a flat (“How delicious is to have a place like this all to one’s self! What a miserable thing is to be a woman”, (Wharton 2008, 8)). The freedom Lily imagined she had when she owned money was limited because although Selden told her he knew a woman who had a flat, Lily did not believe in that kind of freedom. So, the character of Lily Bart is one which is focused on

having money in order to gain freedom even though this freedom is thought of in a superficial mode.

I noticed above that the poor need money and the rich want something else in exchange, but it is also important to mention how the parts of the exchange are balanced. Firstly, there is to observe the way that upper class sees this exchange balanced. Another moment which I think is relevant for a better understanding of how an exchange evolves in the novel from the rich people point of view is the one in which Lily Bart asks Gus Trenor to take care of her finances. Trenor gives her 9000\$ but he expects something in return:

‘I’ll tell you what I want: I want to know just where you and I stand. Hang it, the man who pays for the dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at table.’

[...] I don’t want to insult you. But a man’s got his feelings—and you’ve played with mine too long. [...] Of course I know now what you wanted—it wasn’t my beautiful eyes you were after—but I tell you what, Miss Lily, you’ve got to pay up for making me think so——‘ [...]

‘Pay up?’ she faltered. ‘Do you mean that I owe you money?’

He laughed again. ‘Oh, I’m not asking for payment in kind. But there’s such a thing as fair play—and interest on one’s money—and hang me if I’ve had as much as a look from you——‘. (Wharton 2008, 143)

Gus Trenor understands things his own way. He’s a man who thinks a favor needs to be paid with another favor. He does not play fair because he never informs Lily of his intentions and he talks to her showing he basically believes that the logical next step would be that Lily would offer herself to him. By presenting this dialogue between the two characters, Edith Wharton criticizes the high class to which nothing is for free. Besides, the way Gus makes

business shows the values he is guided by are incorporated in one element: money and exchanges.

There is clearly a misunderstanding between these two characters, because Lily is naive and falls into his trap; besides she does not realize what Gus wants from her until he tells her. The fact he wants to deceive Lily makes him a cunning man. Edith Wharton includes in the novel a class critique through the lengths of Gus' strategy to lure Lily. Trenor knows deep down, even if he does not want to admit it, that his doing is deceiving and that is why he tricks Lily into coming to his house. He lies to Lily, pretending it is his wife who called her and after he sees Lily insists in leaving, he handles the situation in a cunning way. Gus Trenor wants an exchange which is not fair. The exact use of the words "fair play" accentuate his request is not at all fair and the narrator shows his hypocrisy with choosing this use of words.

So, Gus, a representative of the upper-class, is pretending to be a victim, asking without remorse that Lily would give up her integrity and have sex with him, in exchange for the money she received. Wharton is thus criticizing Trenor's class, by showing their lack of morals. His power resides in his money, and this was a prominent aspect of the nineteenth century. A different perspective is brought by Dimock who focuses on the iniquitous system of exchange:

The principle of exchange, the idea that one has to 'pay' for what one gets, lays claim to a kind of quid pro quo justice, and it is this justice, this 'fair play', that Trenor demands from Lily. What he does not (or chooses not to) recognize is that what he calls 'fair' is by no means self-evident and certainly not computable on an absolute scale. [...] Prices will remain arbitrary as long as the exchange rests on a negotiated parity between the exchange items – negotiated according to the bargaining powers of the contracting parties. (Dimock 1985, 784)

The critic thinks that it is only normal that the value of payments stays groundless as long as there is a negotiation between those who make the payments. I want to argue the fact the Dimock's affirmations do not apply to all situations in the novel. For instance, the moment I was commenting above lacks the negotiation at a first level since the initial talk between Gus and Lily shows she has no idea what he implies. He is the only one negotiating, she is too scared to think as she herself admits afterwards: "I can't think—I can't think", she moaned, and leaned her head against the rattling side of the cab" (Wharton 2008, 145). Dimock is right in saying Trenor demands a just exchange but with one remark: that an exchange cannot be requested if the rules are not known to both sides. How can this exchange be right if the parts did not agree with it from the beginning of the deal? I conclude by saying this is barely a negotiation at all. He tries to manipulate her by playing the victim of her derision. Gus doesn't negotiate, he takes it to the next level which is the one of threats. He is used to getting what he wants, and he initiates this exchange, believing Lily would owe him and would have no other way out than to satisfy his fantasies.

Placed in an opposite direction, Simon Rosedale wishes to save what Gus Trenor wanted to steal away: her reputation, her image in the eyes of the ones who are a part of the high society. Nevertheless, money is still a part of the negotiation. He wants to offer her money and in exchange she has to be in the good graces of the high society. She has to use blackmail in order to achieve this. Wharton presents this chain of blackmails (Trenor blackmails Lily, Rosedale does the same and Lily is determined to blackmail Bertha) in order to build a technique through which she criticizes the social classes because they care so much about superficial things. Marriage is not primarily based on love, but on money. When Lily, after learning her aunt disinherited her, tells him she wants to marry Rosedale, he wants to negotiate the marriage. He tells her the only way he would accept her as his wife was if she used the letters sent by Bertha to Selden and blackmailed her into accepting her again as a

friend. Rosedale knows that once Bertha accepts Lily as her friend again, the others would welcome her too in the society. Simon Rosedale is also playing by the rules imposed by the society because his guiding principle is based upon the fact that the end justifies the means. The end is he would marry a beautiful woman who would be well received in the society but the means would be blackmail and also damage to the receiver of the letters, Selden. So, what Rosedale offers to Lily is money but he wants her dignity for a change. If Lily had accepted the bargain, she would have become just like them.

Moving on, I want to learn the way Lily reacts to what seems to be an exchange. As Dimock considers her to be an attractor for requests of the sort:

Of all the characters, Lily Barth has the most puzzling and contradictory relation to the market-place. A self-acknowledged 'human merchandise' (256), she is busy marketing herself throughout most of the book, worried only about the price she would fetch. [...]
Lily is clearly caught up in the ethos of exchange. (Dimock 1985, 783)

Dimock affirms Lily is aware of the fact that she is seen as a "human merchandise". There is one aspect I am against to in Dimock's statements. I disagree with the fact she is selling herself. Certainly other characters see her as being naive, especially Gus Trenor. To prove my point, I will expose some of the conversation with Gus which presents to the reader a woman who fights for her dignity. At first, she is ignorant of what Gus insinuates. Then, gradually, she figures out his intentions and looks for a way out. The words Trenor tells her have a strong effect on her. One moment she panics, then she gains her lucidity and searches to get away from him without causing a scene:

'I don't know what you mean—but you must see, Gus, that I can't stay here talking to you at this hour——' [...]

‘Your money? What have I to do with your money? You advised me how to invest mine ... you must have seen I knew nothing of business ... you told me it was all right—
—‘ [...]

‘I *have* thanked you; I've shown I was grateful. What more have you done than any friend might do, or any one accept from a friend?’ [...]

Over and over her the sea of humiliation broke—wave crashing on wave so close that the moral shame was one with the physical dread. It seemed to her that self-esteem would have made her invulnerable—that it was her own dishonour which put a fearful solitude about her. (Wharton 2008, 142-4)

I believe Lily is put here in a situation from which she has to choose the way to act. This decision would then influence the course of events. The novel is built around these key scenes which later on influence the whole course of fiction. Lily is a naive character that Wharton created in order to criticize the imperfect society she lived in. Although, Lily does not accept this kind of exchange:

‘I've told you I don't understand—but if I owe you money you shall be paid——‘ [...]

She stood silent, frozen to her place. The words—the words were worse than the touch! Her heart was beating all over her body—in her throat, her limbs, her helpless useless hands. Her eyes travelled despairingly about the room—they lit on the bell, and she remembered that help was in call. Yes, but scandal with it—a hideous mustering of tongues. No, she must fight her way out alone. It was enough that the servants knew her to be in the house with Trenor—there must be nothing to excite conjecture in her way of leaving it. (Wharton 2008, 144)

Lily reacts in a way which shows she wants to be honest. She is willing to pay the money Gus Trenor thinks she owes him. She shows determination but on the inside she feels trapped. She

cannot make use of her body parts as she is astonished by Trenor's request. This quote shows the reader a complex character which is put above money. Lily is created of what may first appear as several contradictions. How come she wants to have money but at the same time she refuses it when given to her? She wants to have money but not at any cost, which proves she still has dignity. The characters who move around her don't see this quality in Lily. They act out of pure egoism and they expect her to do the same. To sustain my affirmations, I quote James W. Gargano, who says "Money assures privilege, but privilege, too cheaply construed, dissipates into an expense of spirit and a waste of shame" (James W. Gargano 1972, 139). Gargano considers the money is in vain if the characters lack morality. They cannot use it for privilege since privilege is wasted through shameless acts. You cannot be privileged and immoral at the same time. I believe Lily is constructed the same way. She does not want filthy money, she does not want to be wealthy if the price for it is something which would harm the others. She would rather give up hope for obtaining money from a marriage: "I'd forgotten there was no room to dash about in – how beautifully one does have to behave in a small flat! Oh, Gerty, I wasn't meant to be good" (Wharton 2008, 258). Lily, by saying this, becomes aware of the fact that she is completely unlucky, no matter what she does or how much she wants to change it. Being "good" means being wealthy: a safe marriage that can place her in the middle of the upper-class social circles. Her desire for a high status and money, together with her inability to be unkind or dishonest gets her to a point where it is impossible for her to obtain both money and love. Wharton exposes a society which functions with this set of rules, according to which Lily cannot have money if she does not behave as it demands, no matter how unjust these demands are.

Going back to the moment where we have the conversation between Gus and Lily about investing her capital, I also observe the comments of the narrator describe Lily as a woman

who does not know much about investing money. If she had perceived the plot in which she sank, she probably would not have made the same choices:

She was too genuinely ignorant of the manipulations of the stock-market to understand his technical explanations, or even perhaps to perceive that certain points in them were slurred; the haziness enveloping the transaction served as a veil for her embarrassment, and through the general blur her hopes dilated like lamps in a fog. She understood only that her modest investments were to be mysteriously multiplied without risk to herself; and the assurance that this miracle would take place within a short time. (Wharton 2008, 84)

Lily is not prepared to play by the rules this society imposes, she is unsecure, “her hopes dilated like lamps in a fog” and the only thing she wants is to be assured of a good life as she finds out that multiplying her investments in a short time would be a miracle. She is not aware of Trenor’s intentions, she does not want to get her hands dirty in the process and she acts for reaching that purpose. Lily is a stranger in a world where money rules, as she does not know how to face this society which seems to take its decisions depending on money. Wharton reveals the fact this type of society does not accept people who are not prepared to play by the rules. Lily does not know a way which would not mean to break also her principles in order for her to be part of the society.

The author presents Bertha’s behavior towards Lily (Bertha denigrates Lily and so, her reputation is stained), in order to criticize the way the high class can dispose as they want of the ones they consider inferior to them. Bertha tells Lily she ought to stay on shore, so Lily leaves the yacht, not before trying to salvage the appearances. Dimock is right when emphasizing the idea that the intrigues and society games are met at every step in the novel:

“[...] doublethink is the very essence of the exchange system, a system in which use and abuse are the same thing, in which legislations violate and violations legislate, in which, to play by the rules, one must break the rules.” (Dimock 1985, 785)

Connected to the idea explained above by Dimock, especially by the game of words “to play the rules, one must break the rules”, I think Wharton emphasizes the differences between the essence and the appearance. Selden does not care for instance to learn the truth as to what happened at Trenor’s house. He judges Lily based on the fact he saw her leaving Gus’ house late in the night. So, the world in which the characters move is a world based on appearances. It does not matter whether Lily’s intentions are not evil, it does not matter Lily is inclined to do good deeds, all that matters is the way she is perceived by the others. The appearances which govern the world are represented by money. To prove this, I need to remind only the fact that Lily is constantly in search of a profitable marriage. Also, at one point she herself admits that if she had had money, she would not have been ignored by the others:

‘I shouldn't have minded, you know, if I'd got the money—‘ and at Miss Farish's protesting ‘Oh!’ she repeated calmly: ‘Not a straw, my dear; for, in the first place, they wouldn't have quite dared to ignore me; and if they had, it wouldn't have mattered, because I should have been independent of them. But now—!’ (Wharton 2008, 219-20)

In the end, I think Lily acknowledges the way she is perceived by the others is very important for her social status. If she wants independence she needs money. The text offers us a smart woman who realizes the society she lives in is based on appearances: following the rules of the rich but at the same time succeeding in avoiding a behavior which denigrates the way she perceives herself.

To conclude, everything revolves to money in the novel: marriage, life, happiness. The rich take advantage of it to obtain what they wish, even if this implies an immoral behavior

against the poor ones. Trenor extorts Lily and he is not the only one as I have shown above. Lily is an exception from this prototype because the narrative shows a woman who does not stain her image in order to obtain a fortune. It is because of the way Lily is built that Wharton succeeds in emphasizing the way in which the society treats the ones who do not have money. Edith Wharton creates a social class critique in the novel *The House of Mirth*, as she builds characters who behave in a dishonest way and situations centered on money.

2. *The Great Gatsby* and the Social Importance of Money

This chapter will be focused on the importance money plays in *The Great Gatsby* and it states that money is a very important factor in the characters' lives. Critics have written a lot about this novel and many of them state that Fitzgerald criticizes the upper class in it (Berman 2001). All of the characters are influenced by money without exception. For instance, Myrtle believes Wilson is not a good husband because he does not have money to buy a wedding suit; Daisy does not leave Tom because she loses money. Important decisions the characters make are based on money, either there are connected to losing it or gaining it. This technique is created by Fitzgerald so that he can present the social class critique through the way the characters are built.

Reading the critique studies, I have noticed some of them are concerned with the social prejudices of the characters, including Ronald Berman, who thinks that "social judgment matters more" in the novel (Berman 2001, 79). The society in Fitzgerald's novel is guided by immoral principles, but at the same time, criticizes and gossips about others like for instance Gatsby's fortune. This implies the belief according to which they are better than anyone, even if they are not and they criticize the errors the others do. The critic catalogues the other critics' opinions which have been approaches to three grand subjects regarding the interpretation based on the novel's background. The first which is of interest to us is "the novel's development from Fitzgerald's earlier writing about love and money" (Berman 2001, 79). This theme has followed the author in other writings as well. On the other hand, H. L. Mencken states that "the life of post-war New York City" (Berman 2001, 81) is perfect for describing it in literature because it is "a spectacle, lush and barbaric in its every detail" (Berman 2001, 81). Further on, Ronald Berman describes this spectacle:

It is a world of broken relationships and false relationships; a world of money and success rather than of social responsibility; a world in which individuals are all too free to determine their moral destinies. Daisy warns Nick and the reader about the way this world is when she says, 'I think everything's terrible anyhow'. Because she believes that, she is free to act any way she wants. (Berman 2001, 83-4)

The lack of morality is perceived by the critics and its main reason is represented by money. Berman explains that social responsibilities do not count and so are things with the human relationships. The freedom of the characters is misinterpreted and they act as being situated above good and evil. There is no responsibility and the characters' actions are indicating this; furthermore, by just presenting it, the author criticizes their behavior. Their decisions show they are not wise people and they cannot weigh the consequences of their actions. An example would be the end of the novel, in which Daisy flees with Tom, after killing Myrtle Wilson and after Gatsby being willing to take the blame. I think Berman perceives the true nature of the world presented in the book and I also believe Scott Fitzgerald intends a critique of this type of society in which people are selfish and egocentric.

The beginning of the novel *The Great Gatsby* starts with a quote by Thomas Parke D'Invilliers. This quote is an important one, since there is a subtlety of language which practically announces one of the major themes of the novel: "Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her; / If you can bounce high, bounce for her too, / Till she cry "Lover, gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover, / I must have you!" (Fitzgerald 2013)

The irony in this passage, which Fitzgerald chooses to introduce at the beginning of the book, hints the reader about the power money has over love. The fact the feelings have a diminished role in the society is regarded with notes of sarcasm, the corruption of the money chasers being signaled out. The lines describe the situation which will be further on presented, which includes the relationship between Gatsby / Tom and Daisy. Gatsby / Tom is the "gold-hatted

lover” and Daisy is the woman in love with the gold. “Then wear the gold hat, if that will move her” sounds like a piece of advice for Gatsby, who builds an empire just to bring Daisy into his arms again. She already has that fortune, and as Stephen Matterson affirms in his study, “The ‘money’ in Daisy’s voice suggests also the exclusive club of the wealthy to which she and Tom belong” (Matterson 1990, 46). She does not need Gatsby’s money anymore, she belongs to the wealthy society now.

Fitzgerald uses a very interesting technique in criticizing the way in which the characters become corrupt through the means of money. Since the beginning of the first chapter, the narrator becomes also a character, Nick Carraway, the narration being made from a subjective perspective. Through the observations of Nick Carraway, the author introduces his class critique, connected to the perspective of money: “In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since.” (Fitzgerald 2013, 1). The narrator has been turning over and over the advice from his father because it is a hard one to listen to. The human’s nature is inclined towards criticizing and judging other people’s character and behavior, so Nick is overthinking the advice to understand the way through which he could listen to it: “Whenever you feel like criticizing any one”, he told me, “just remember that all the people in this world haven’t had the advantages that you’ve had” (Fitzgerald 2013, 1). It is an effective way of talking directly to the reader, warning him about the story which will follow; it is a warning for the reader not to judge the characters and their decisions and by giving this piece of advice, the author actually makes an opposite statement. While reading the book, the reader will most probably feel inclined to pass a judgment, as the presented situations are morally challenging, but he must not, he must not read the book with this purpose: “Reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope” (Fitzgerald 2013, 2). On the other hand, the character acknowledges there is a limit to this indulgence he was bringing forth: “And, after boasting this way of my tolerance, I come

to the admission it has a limit. Conduct may be founded on the hard rock of the wet marshes but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on" (Fitzgerald 2013, 2). This spontaneity of changing the course of the thoughts, offers the reader liberty of choosing the way to think of the characters introduced in the novel and their actions. All the more it is to be realized the intention of the narrator to expose the desires for gold and their poisonous consequences.

As the narration starts developing, the main character, Gatsby, is introduced. Due to the social position he has, this character is presented through the eyes of the narrator, but also through the eyes of the others, like a person who does not have a good reputation. It is easy to observe that the intention of the novel is to criticize the upper class if it is taken into consideration the characters' wishes for wealth. But Gatsby, as it turns out, is an exception to the rules. The narrator, which knows the story's end, affirms that money is not what defines the main character:

Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book, was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby who represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn. If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then, there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life [...]. Gatsby turned out all right at the end. (Fitzgerald 2013, 2)

Gatsby is indeed different from the others as he knows money is but a tool that might help him to reach his dream – to get Daisy back. The things that matter in life are not brought by fortune, and the character acts like a wise man who knows that happiness is not a product of money making, because he is still having a "sensitivity to the promises of life" (Fitzgerald 2013, 2) a rare quality beyond the wealthy ones. It does not mean he does not chase another mirage, but the charms of gold is not it. Gatsby is the character which holds on to the past more than any other character. Love is the feeling which draws him back to Daisy, a girl that

is inaccessible to him. Knowing that, he tries to get her back by increasing his fortune, so although he knows money is an illusion, he tries to use it for his purpose.

Gatsby – as does the Buchanan family – represents the wealth and opulence in life but the character's description is totally different than Tom's:

It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced – or seemed to face – the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (Fitzgerald 2013, 62)

Unlike Tom, Gatsby receives the warmest characterization: besides his formality as an effect of his manners, Gatsby is portrayed as a thoughtful and kind person throughout the novel. Gatsby is a character created to strengthen the self-reliance of the other characters: “he believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself”, and more than this, to help the other characters develop in a harmonious way: “had precisely the impression of you that [...] you hoped to convey”. He seems to know that the value of people is way more important than the value of money, this is why his generosity has no limits: he helps his father by sending him money, whilst Tom is, on the contrary, receiving money from his family. Money did not affect Gatsby's behavior, he developed himself into an open-hearted person and even modest in his deepness – he offered the majestic parties just to attract one guest and he did not deeply enjoy his own parties. Through this he achieved a moral correctness during the journey to his aim.

The description of Tom Buchanan – Daisy's husband – creates the image of a superficial person who does things just because he can: “They had spent a year in France, for no particular reason, and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo

and were rich together” (Fitzgerald 2013, 8). Tom was a football player and he “was a sturdy, straw haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth and a supercilious manner. Two shining, arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearance of always leaning aggressively forward” (Fitzgerald 2013, 9). In this passage I noticed Tom is a proud character and wealthy people like him have money, but there is a specific superiority in their behavior. They are willing to spread “dominance” and ask for respect only because they are wealthy. Tom is also created as a character that mostly shows harshness – not only physical, and here I can refer to the opening scene, when he categorically expresses his opinion regarding racism: “It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things” (Fitzgerald 2013, 17).

Fitzgerald criticizes the qualities that are meant to be attributed to the upper class (good manners) by showing how in his novel some characters have the worst behavior, despite their breeding. Tom, used as the best example, shows up as a rude person, abrupt and ill tempered – the scene where he breaks Myrtle’s nose is the most suitable in this case, showing how limited his manners can be. To create the other side of the comparison, Fitzgerald puts Gatsby in a brighter light, by showing that he, the self-made wealthy man born to a poor family, is a constant gentleman that can always maintain a perfectly exemplary ethic, even when meeting his rival, Tom. Ironically, this is how wealthy and well-bred people want to distinguish themselves from the others, by the use of good manners.

Tom has the advantage a fortune can offer and he knows how to benefit from it. He buys things that only a person with a lot of money can buy and he becomes aggressive because of the power money can offer. Ronald Berman notices this and when talking about building characters in Fitzgerald’s novels, he thinks that in fact “the social order is against” (Berman 2001, 80) money and when a poor boy rises like Gatsby does, Tom has “less space to breathe” (Berman 2001, 80), so the problems occur. I do not believe the social order is

against money, because everything is based on money. Respect also is lately bought by wealthy people, only because they can afford it, not because they deserve it. On the other hand, I agree with Ronald Berman: “rich boys have less space to breathe in” (Berman 2001, 80), they feel like their air is contaminated by the poor ones. Tom is thus the image of “control, exclusion” and “threat” (Berman 2001, 80) and the house he lives in basically states the same:

Their house was even more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay. (...) The front was broken by a line of French windows, glowing now with reflected gold (8). / The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding-cake of the ceiling, and then rippled over the wine-colored rug, making a shadow on it as wind does to the sea. (Fitzgerald 2013, 10)

Fitzgerald extends to significant lengths when describing Tom’s estate and his tremendous wealth. He offers a lot of images, more or less connected to the things that happened or that are going to happen further in the novel. For example, the supremacy of their house is given by the massive classic design – the Georgian Colonial mansions are usually designed with arched entries, cornice, a natural fit in America in that time, if we refer to the architectural style. The French windows show nothing but immensity, light braided with “reflected gold”, the absolute richness, the old money. The interior design is a clue to Daisy’s reason of marrying Tom: wealth – “the frosted wedding-cake” shape of the ceiling. Everything started and ended in that point: by marrying Tom, Daisy entered the good world, but her hopes remained “frosted” somewhere right at the beginning of her new life. Money was not able to make a home out of their house and this can be noticed throughout the novel, so the money supremacy looks like nothing worthwhile.

The nucleus of the family Buchanan is highlighted by emptiness: they never meet their families, they never seem to care about their daughter and their marriage is a mess (Tom cheats on Daisy and Daisy is unhappy). Tom is described by the narrator exactly after Gatsby is presented and the obvious differences are immediately depicted. So, Tom is “a national figure in a way, one of those men who reach such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anticlimax. His family were enormously wealthy” (Fitzgerald 2013, 7). Discussing the comparison between Tom and Gatsby I noticed Fitzgerald creates a line of opposition between the two of them. Tom is the absolute incarnation of the upper class; he did not work to reach such a position on a wealth scale, everything he has is inherited and so we find out that the family descent (lineage) is probably the most important factor to indicate the class rank. This is a theme that follows the novel from the beginning to the end – the importance of inherited wealth and its benefits versus the unknown background, the one that has as an example Gatsby himself.

The narrator makes contact with this family and they appear to the reader as people who need to be accepted and admired by the others: “getting rich is easier than being accepted” (Berman 2001, 80), Berman states, and they seem to know it because when observing Tom, the narrator affirms: “We were in the same senior society, and while we were never intimate I always had the impression that he (Tom) approved of me and wanted me to like him with some harsh, defiant wistfulness of his own” (Fitzgerald 2013, 9). His wife’s behavior suggests she is seeking for the same attention: “I’ve heard it said that Daisy’s murmur was only to make people lean toward her” (Fitzgerald 2013, 11). Tom and Daisy are in a constant need of admiration. Nick appears to be an attentive passive observer which discovers Tom’s weakness, the fact that he enjoys demeaning the others, believing that this is one of the factors that can place a person above the other ones. Even if we only have other people’s direct judgments and not Nick’s, we can still find out Daisy’s characterization: a

manipulative but seductive lady, with a seductive and pleasant attitude. Anyway, we can clearly see one more factor that brings Tom and Daisy together: besides money, they want to be admired. And beneath this constant need for attention I think there is actually the need of being accepted, of being approved as part of the society. So, in a way, money is nothing if it cannot be shown, if it cannot gain attention. And money does not put away the loneliness.

Although money can buy many things, it cannot buy fidelity and it cannot take the sorrow and estrangement which intervene between Tom and Daisy. These two are alone together. Living to the expectations of the society, faking it for all to be perfect in the eyes of the others, they do not form a happy couple. I will take a look at what Daisy says to Nick:

“Well, I’ve had a very bad time, Nick, and I’m pretty cynical about everything. (...) Well, she was less than an hour old and Tom was God knows where. I woke up out of the ether with an utterly abandoned feeling, and asked the nurse right away if it was a boy or a girl.” (...) “All right”, I said, “I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool – that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool” (Fitzgerald 2013, 22)

This shows that money does not bring fulfillment. Daisy wanted to emphasize that Tom had never been there when she needed his support. She was also aware of the subordinate role that women were expected to have, the wealthy ones especially. They were supposed to tolerate the affairs of their husbands. Daisy clearly states her opinion on power and gender, but she only wants to show that she knows more than she pretends to know. Thus, they are both interested in keeping a decent illusion of a stable marriage.

Daisy and Tom are not the only unhappy couple. Myrtle affirms:

“I married him because I thought he was a gentleman”, she said finally. “I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn’t fit to lick my shoe”

“The only *crazy* I was when I married him. I knew right away I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody’s best suit to get married in, and never even told me about it, and the man came after it one day, when he was out”. (Fitzgerald 2013, 44-5)

Wilson’s suit might be presented here as a contrast of Tom’s attitude before marriage – he offered as a gift to his fiancée a pearl necklace, a symbol of his ability to offer Daisy a rich life and this is what Myrtle was looking for. Here we can find a similarity between Daisy and Myrtle: they are both kept in loveless and unhappy marriages, but with different perspectives: Daisy would lose everything by leaving Tom, but we cannot say the same thing about Myrtle, who has not got in fact anything to lose. She is living an illusion as well as Gatsby, because she is running towards what she thinks Tom represents: excitement and money. It can also be pointed out that the lack of money does not bring happiness either, so we may have just the illusion that money brings happiness, but it is not real. Myrtle affirms that “you can’t live forever. You can’t live forever” (Fitzgerald 2013, 46), but her affair with Tom is only temporarily bringing her joy, because he is not a gentleman either and he will not leave Daisy for Myrtle, like Daisy will not leave Tom for Gatsby. In fact, there is not even one character in the novel that we can totally say it is happy, there is no happiness in Fitzgerald’s novel.

Most of the characters keep on wanting to relive the past and for Gatsby money is the only chance to get Daisy back. Gatsby lives in the past, in his happy memories with Daisy and he believes that once he shows her the money he has got, he would get her back and they will be happy once more. But he is not the only one, as Ernest Lockridge affirms in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby*:

Several characters in the novel desire to repeat a significant past preserved in memory. As a football end for Yale, Tom Buchanan reached ‘such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anticlimax’; [...] Nick himself, at novel’s end, returns west in hope, it seems, of repeating his ‘vivid’ memory ‘of

coming back West from prep school and later from college at Christmas time.
(Lockridge 1984, 11)

Tom is in the same situation as Gatsby. He does not want to replay a moment of sentimental nature, but one concerning the success, the admiration that he was wrapped in, the climax of his youthfulness. He still had money and he was successful to. On the other hand, Nick is tired of seeing the world going to where money dictates, so he wants to relieve a past free of it. He tries to get back to a moment of spiritual and mental peace at the end of the novel.

Gatsby's character and wishes concerning money are completely different to those of Daisy's. He has other values which guide him. For instance, he thinks money is primary in his life only for the purpose of getting Daisy back. As for Daisy, she does not want to give up money, because if she is not happy having it, she knows she will be unhappy if she lost it. Besides, she and Tom seem at some point to be made one another, both being shallow and trying to preserve the appearances. For instance, they pretend to be interested in accumulating as much knowledge as they can, but when a conversation about a book starts, it can be seen the fact Tom is a little bit above ignorance; the discussion about Goddard's "The Rise of the Colored Empires" is relevant, where in describing the book's subject, Tom says: "Well, it's a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It's all scientific stuff; it's been proved." (Fitzgerald 2013, 17). Indeed, it has been proved that the narrator is being ironic in showing even though Tom is rich and has all the opportunities to study and to access unlimited resources, he chooses not to do so. And that would be fine if he did not try to show off with a subject he is not mastering. Furthermore, Daisy highlights his and her ignorance by saying: "Tom's getting very profound," said Daisy with an expression of unthoughtful sadness. "He reads deep books with long words in them. What was that word we –" (Fitzgerald 2013, 17). The lack of depth can be easily grasped and irony is used for showing it.

Contrasting with Tom and Daisy's selfishness, Gatsby's generosity can be easily grasped. So, to prove that Gatsby is a generous man, who does not care how much money he spends, I will refer to the countless parties he throws:

People were not invited – they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. [...] Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all, came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket to admission. (Fitzgerald 2013, 53)

Gatsby, the freshly rich man descended from farmer parents, is showing his generosity, by the free use of his money. He organizes glamorous parties, where he offers an inexhaustible variety of life: free drinks, food, shelter and entertainment to hundreds of people, from all kind of classes. It was hard to understand what was all that for, especially because he was not really enjoying his own parties or he was never directly inviting the movie stars, directors or rich ladies – that was only the way to his incorruptible dream. We can see how selfish Tom is, in comparison to Gatsby – he would never share his unearned fortune: he refuses to give George Wilson one of his cars, he's not even listening to Wilson's prayers. It should not be forgotten that Gatsby buys a house to his father too, we find it out at the end of the novel, where it is impossible for his father to hide his admiration and emotion for his son. His father believed in his son and knew he will be rich one day and that he will inevitable get higher and higher into the society.

These parties are not only indicating a rich man's generosity. They are also occasions for Gatsby to study the rich and their ways. Also, he hopes to meet Daisy there, so one indicator as to why he is throwing these parties is the illusion he wants to sustain. He is in love with an icon of the past, Daisy is not the girl he fell in love with, but Gatsby will never show any sign of knowing this. On this matter, John Fraser in *Dust and Dreams and the 'The Great Gatsby'* affirms the novel

[...] is especially concerned with the relationship between ideals and conduct, and its thesis on this subject appears to be as follows: To have large romantic ideals is almost certainly to be mistaken, because of the nature of the nature of ideals, but to attempt to do without them is to live emptily and to thwart a permanent human craving; hence almost any large romantic ideals, however mistaken, deserved to be viewed respectfully. (Fraser 1965, 555)

This whole process concerning Gatsby never letting go of Daisy's ideal image is not to blame, cannot be blamed, as it is, according to the critic, a way of living your life in a greater manner than having no hopes and dreams at all. Gatsby's ideals are never crushed, even though there are many disappointments coming from Daisy. For starters, she never leaves Tom although the spark between her and Gatsby is re-ignited.

One of the ways that, on the other hand, the other characters act, is connected to the amount of money they have. Daisy and Tom have a behavior which illustrates they have money. One of Daisy and Nick's conversation, contains the constant attempts of showing the many advantages that money brings: "And I *know*. I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything.' Her eyes flashed around her in a defiant way, rather like Tom's, and she laughed with thrilling scorn. 'Sophisticated – God, I'm sophisticated!'" (Fitzgerald 2013, 23). She has a snob's attitude, trying to impress those around her, this being actually a show for how easy she is influenced by the world she moves in. She wants to believe about herself she is sophisticated for travelling. The money she has through marrying Tom, brings her these advantages she enjoys. Also, she wants so much to be a part of that society that she is willing to do anything and this way, her conscience is put in the shadows.

The same happens with Myrtle, who does not care that she is cheating on her husband with Tom. Her reasons for having an affair are shallow and are connected to the fact her husband does not have any money:

“I knew right away I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody’s best suit to get married in and never even told me about it, and the man came after it one day when he was out.” She looked around to see who was listening. “Oh, is that your suit? I said. This is the first I ever heard about it.” (Fitzgerald 2013, 45)

Myrtle is much alike Daisy. She believes money means a lot of power and although she wants to have it, she does not work for it. She wants easy money and that is why she starts seeing Tom, whom she forgives and *loves* even after he hits her. Myrtle feels disappointed by her husband, but in fact, she is disappointed by not having money.

Furthermore, money is involved in all of these characteristics which dominate the New York society, as described in the novel. *The Great Gatsby* represents hence “A new kind of American novel” (Berman 2001, 81), in which the reader can see a technique through which money drives the characters to act in different directions. Gatsby is obsessed with relieving the past with the help of money, Daisy wants money to live a great life, Myrtle wants money to climb the social stair and Nick is trapped in this world, where he observes the way money changes things.

Michael Millgate is another critic who states the fact the society is one of the main points of focus for Fitzgerald:

In stressing the corruption at the heart of Gatsby's dream, as well as exposing, in the revelation of Daisy's character, the tawdriness of what the dream aspires to, Fitzgerald clearly intended a fundamental criticism of the 'American Dream' itself and of the business society to which, in the twentieth century, it had become indissolubly wedded. (Millgate 1962, 336).

Money is an illusion which dictates the way one should behave. This illusion is like a trap into which all the characters fall. Gatsby is the character constructed to survive this illusion in the ways the others do not, but his life is wasted on an idea which is not perceived and

appreciated. The only one who grasps his true essence is Nick. Even though Gatsby sees beyond a fortune, money is still influencing his desires, because Daisy, the one whom he loves is married to a fortune and she is not willing to give it back. The characters' conscience has perished and Charles Thomas Samuels depicts this:

Fitzgerald's world represents iconographically a sterile, immoral society. [...] Like other objects in the book to which value might be attached, the eyes of Dr. Eckleburg are a cheat. They are not a sign of God, as Wilson thinks, but only an advertisement, like the false promise of Daisy's moneyed voice, or the green light on her dock, which is invisible in the mist. These monstrous eyes are the novel's major symbol. The book's chief characters are blind, and they behave blindly. Gatsby does not see Daisy's vicious emptiness, and Daisy, deluded, thinks she will reward her gold-hatted lover until he tries to force from her an affirmation she is too weak to make. (Samuels 1966, 786)

I agree with C.T. Samuels when he affirms that the characters are blind and “behave blindly”, being governed by money. In the end, I think money governs Fitzgerald's world in many ways, being a killer of dreams. Gatsby's illusion dies and he dies with it. His hopes are crushed and the others do not care. This can be seen at his funeral, where almost no one shows up. The evil power of the money has been shown in so many situations; for instance many came to his parties, but no one came to his funeral. This is an indication for the true values which are mastered by money and also an indication for the sterile, immoral society that Fitzgerald's characters belong to. Also, money is not something which can prolong Gatsby's life, or gain love and friends. Those guests to his parties were shallow too and they were opportunists just trying to have some fun. To sum it up, I think that Fitzgerald realizes a social critique class through the lengths of the characters' money desire. The fact Daisy chooses money and social position over responsibility and love, the choice Gatsby makes in

gaining money, Myrtle cheating on her husband, are all scenes which represent techniques through which the author criticizes the social classes.

3. Comparison. Money: Same Dangers, Different Circumstances in *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby*

This chapter explains the many analogies between *The Great Gatsby* and *The House of Mirth*, referring to the role money is playing. Many critics are not concerned with analyzing this comparison between these two novels, hence I thought it is a good opportunity to study the common points concerning money because I think this chapter will be a contribution to the so far critical studies. Money is a main powerful factor in these two novels, as it motivates both Jay Gatsby and Lily Bart to act.

Firstly, I will focus on the main characters, Gatsby and Lily Bart and on the influence money has on them. As Gatsby's character is concerned, he thinks money is only a means to obtain Daisy's love. In fact, all of his actions are based on making money, so money is the one governing his life. As discussed in the former chapter, Gatsby meets Daisy when he was not yet rich. So he loses her and to get her back he acknowledges that he needs money. In discussing this aspect, Stephen Matterson points out that Gatsby actually uses Daisy as a pretense, his true desire being to have money:

An important point here is that the two are confused in Gatsby himself. Although he dreams of spiritual reunion with Daisy, his prior dream was of wealth and advancement, as is evident from the schedule of exercises and resolutions that he wrote in 1906. (Matterson 1990, 32)

Matterson is concerned with what seems to be the hierarchy of love and money. The first rank is occupied by money, so it is in this case an instrument for Gatsby to obtain what he thinks to be the love of his life. And he does succeed in making a fortune. I do not totally agree with the critic, as there are other arguments in the novel which make this affirmation a debatable

one. One of them would be that the parties Gatsby threw for all those strangers had the purpose to impress Daisy and to be closer to her: “Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay. [...] I think he half expected her to wander into one of his parties, some night” (Fitzgerald 2013, 101-2). If he had cared about the money in the first place, he would not have spent it so easily. Hence, these opulent parties are a way through which he shows the amount of money he has to spend. His need to brag about it does not mean anyhow that the hierarchy is dominated by money. His need to swagger is only determined by his love for Daisy. He wants her to know he is now ready to become her husband. In my opinion, money represents a strong illusion as well, as Gatsby believes Daisy would return to him if he had money. So, his efforts of making a fortune are all due to his need of Daisy. That is why he does not want to leave it all behind, because his achievement is important for him and he wants it to be important for Daisy too, but ultimately it does not mean in the hierarchy that money is more important than Daisy.

On the contrary, Lily is a character who never succeeds in getting money although she needs it to live. Her parents leave her with nothing but beauty, which has to be used, in her mother’s opinion, to gain a wealthy husband. So Lily’s instrument is not money, but beauty. However, she needs money to sustain not only herself, but her position in the upper-class as well. The resemblance is in this case that both characters need money but for different purposes. Gatsby needs it for winning back Daisy, Lily for wanting the high life she has been used to and for adapting to society’s norms. How are these characters relating to money? The difference persists in the way they use money, or want to use money: for Gatsby money is an instrument, the same instrument being represented by beauty for Lily. Money is for Lily the end purpose, as it is Daisy’s love for Gatsby.

Another resemblance is the fact that both novelists choose to sacrifice some characters that become positive in the end, in order to show that the power of money is stronger than

morals. Through this point of view, both Wharton and Fitzgerald proceed to a critique of the social class, one in which most of the rules are set by money. To show this, Fitzgerald creates a generous Gatsby, a character who helps his own father and takes the blame for Daisy's murder. Gatsby accepts everyone at his parties and is patient in his love manifestations for Daisy. He is sacrificed for Daisy's salvation – Daisy representing the money chase at the expense of love. Along the same lines, Wharton creates a moral character that she chooses to sacrifice when it comes to bigger money issues. For instance, when Gus Trenor wants sexual favors or his money back, Lily, even though she is poor, chooses to give him the money. In the meanwhile she goes after what she wants, even though she recognizes the situations in which the others take advantage of her presence, and the ones in which she herself takes advantage of the others. One example would be the ship trip. Lily knows there are compromises which can affect her but she chooses to make them anyhow:

Moral complications existed for her only in the environment that had produced them; she did not mean to slight or ignore them, but they lost their reality when they changed their background. (Wharton 2008, 191)

Lily is admiring the view from the *Sabrina*, when thinking on these facts. She is confused because moral issues seem to appear only when in the “environment that had produced them”. When in another background, they changed their meaning, “their reality”. Lily rejects the moral concerns regarding her actions, when they are placed in a different context, although she knows them perfectly well. She likes the perks that come with the trip and she accepts the price she has to pay for them. She is naive, as the phrase in which Wharton indicates the “background” changing her thoughts shows that she lacks wisdom and she does not have profound thinking, this making her a deliberate victim of the society she lives in.

I still insist that Lily and Gatsby lack morality at different points in the book, but the fact that they became better characters only in the end emphasizes the sacrifice described above. While comparing Lily to Gatsby, I state the fact that although Gatsby is, as I said, a man who divides his fortune, throws parties where everyone is invited and buys his father a house, he also has no issues in trying to seduce Daisy, although she is a married woman. Also, he makes money from bootlegging (Fitzgerald 2013, 172). At the same time, through the first book, Lily is determined to follow her mother's advice to get married to a rich man (Wharton 2008, 29-30), even though she does not have feelings for him. At the end of the first book, Lily gets on board of the boat, knowing she was invited to serve Bertha's bad intentions to cheat on her husband. She accepts to do so and she is glad she can enjoy the rich life for a while. So Gatsby's character is built pretty much like Lily's in the way that both of them are not totally bothered by the means they have to use in order to achieve their goals. At the same time, their moral values conquer their lives, as sacrifice becomes what defines them in the end. Lily sacrifices her dreams of having a wealthy life because she does not want to stain her honor. At the same time, Gatsby sacrifices his innocence, taking the blame for Daisy.

Gatsby is an idealist – as far as he has his ideals undoubtedly connected to the past, as he thinks that he can relive it all over again (Fitzgerald 2013, 142). He is sure Daisy would love him all the same like in those years in the past. He has a strong tie to the love story they had and he is convinced it would come to life again if he had the money and the social status. He lives in a lie he would not abandon till the very end. Stephen Matterson quotes Lockridge in saying Gatsby wants to transcend time. I also think Gatsby is living his life under the impression time cannot change the relationship between him and Daisy:

However, Gatsby's dream is bound to fail because its elements, as cited by Lockridge, are in conflict. His dream is an abstract idealism, but it becomes rooted in the material, rather than transcending it. Thus, he is deluded by the belief that making money will

provide him with social position or help preserve youth and in becoming centred on Daisy, his belief in the capacity to transcend time will be dashed. That is, in simply being human, mortal and thereby subject to change and time, Daisy cannot fulfill Gatsby's dream. In kissing Daisy, he had "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath" (p. 118). Because her breath is perishable, he cannot repeat the past with her. (Matterson 1990, 39)

So, according to Matterson, Gatsby is trying to relive the past, by "transcending it". His wish is doomed to fail, as the elements of it are in contrast. "The material", the "perishable" cannot mix with the transcendent. This means he does not accept that humans, which are elements made from flesh and blood, are not made to transcend time. His wish does not transcend the material. It stays there, so his dream cannot be fulfilled. Being human means the body, the mind ages, and all is governed by time. It fades away in the end. Daisy is a loyal subject of these rules so she cannot meet Gatsby's dream. I have noticed the argument that the main character does not succeed in going beyond the material world. His ideal dream becomes incarnated in the material. He wants a perfect love story, this being possible only with seducing again his former lover. But Daisy is not as Gatsby thinks, she cannot meet his image of her. She is unappreciative of his love and of his loyalty. Therefore, Gatsby is loyal to an illusion. He does not accept that time changes things, and he remains trapped in his mental construction about Daisy.

As for Lily, she is also caught in an illusion of her own. She is naive in thinking that once she marries a rich husband, all her problems will end. She does not have the chance to meet a husband in the society in which she spends her time. The people are corrupt, they always want something and they always have a hidden purpose. Lily's naivety perishes the moment Gus Trenor reveals the truth about her investments. At this point I can mention that money serves to reveal the dishonesty of the upper-class. The fact that she had no idea of

Gus' thoughts shows a Lily with no hidden agenda, a Lily who formed in her head an honest business partnership. So, she is as naïve as Gatsby is, by not recognizing the wickedness in people. As Daisy is for Gatsby the symbol of a perfect life with love in it, Lily does not believe there could be something tricky behind Trenor's proposal. These two main characters have an idealist perception regarding the people surrounding them and money is involved in these perceptions, as it blinds them. Gatsby believes that once he will have enough money, Daisy will stay with him. But this is a lie, as money does not bring for Gatsby also a strong social position. Money is not enough for Daisy, and Gatsby does not realize that. Also, Lily wants money and thinks Gus Trenor is the one who will give it to her, will invest for her, making these efforts from the goodness of his heart. This proves to be a lie too, as Trenor reveals his true intentions to Lily.

Also, Lily pretends to be naïve, the moment she accepts to get on the board of the *Sabrina*. She acknowledges Bertha wants to manipulate her and she accepts it, thinking of the advantages she will have. She leaves behind all of her money problems and she feels free and relieved: "The Dorsets' invitation to go abroad with them had come as an almost miraculous release from crushing difficulties" (Wharton 2008, 191). Lily finds this invitation as an escape from her "difficulties", money issues, as Mrs. Peniston only agrees to pay her clothing debts and not her debts made from playing cards. At the same time she is also willing to be again in the high society's spotlight and the trip is a perfect opportunity. From one point of view – that of avoiding to solve the problems, for a little while, Lily and Daisy are alike. Daisy kills Myrtle Wilson and runs away with her husband. Lily escapes her problems not by fighting to solve them, but by fleeing on a trip. Both female characters try to avoid their problems by leaving them behind, and money is involved as usual. Lily knows that her life on the boat will be easy, as she will not need money and she will still live in luxury, as she will be rewarded for the compromise of distracting Bertha's husband. Not to forget that in *The Great Gatsby*,

Daisy runs away with Tom, because she knows her financial and social position will be ensured by her husband.

As opposed to Daisy, Lily does not succeed in running away forever from her problems. She becomes lonely and penniless and dies at the end of the book. The narrator does not indicate whether this was a suicide or a mistake. Critics argue that the ambiguity leaves room for interpreting either way. I believe it is as much as a suicide attempt as a mistake as well. Lily felt an acute need of sleeping. She feels tired of life, tired of her money problems, so that sleep represents an escape in which she can sink and forget. She wants more than anything to sleep:

She had long since raised the dose to its highest limit, but tonight she felt she must increase it. She knew she took a slight risk in doing so – she remembered the chemist’s warning. If sleep came at all, it might be a sleep without waking. But after all that was but one chance in a hundred: the action of the drug was incalculable, and the addition of a few drops to the regular dose would probably do no more than procure for her the rest she so desperately needed... (Wharton 2008, 313)

The fragment above proves that Lily’s actions are in this case dictated by her subconscious, as the craving for sleep determines her to increase the dosage. Wharton is somehow showing through this scene that Lily denies there is a chance for her to never wake up even though she knows the chemist warned her, but in the same time she fools herself deliberately and takes more drops over the highest dose. This proves that to some degree, this “mistake” was assumed. For Lily, sleep is a refuge, a world in which she can escape her worries, her lack of money. The fact that in the end the narrator takes use of the word “probably” in expressing Lily’s thoughts about the few extra drops over the safe limit, helps us understand that the act was in fact deliberate. Without money, life has no sense and by increasing the dose, Wharton creates a character that abandons its life in the hands of chance. At this point in the novel,

anything could happen. Wharton does not warn the reader about what will happen next, but opens two paths. It seems either Lily dies, either she lives.

Hence Lily's "intentional mistake", as I will call it, is from one point of view similar to the way Gatsby dies. Gatsby's death is a mistake, George's mistake, which comes from George's naivety. Daisy's husband informs George that Myrtle has been killed by Gatsby, suggesting he was her lover. George is a trusting character, who never doubts Tom's sayings (Fitzgerald 2013, 181). He is thus, making a mistake he will never acknowledge. He punishes himself by suicide. As George comes to commit another murder, Gatsby's disappointment regarding Daisy is not expressed directly, as the reader knows only through the narrator's voice what Gatsby felt in those moments. Daisy never calls him, she is not grateful for Gatsby taking the blame for her murder. The narrator expresses the thoughts Gatsby probably had, concerning the call that never comes:

[...] he must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. [...] A new world, material without being real, where poor ghosts, breathing dreams like air, drifted fortuitously about... (Fitzgerald 2013, 208)

This passage describes a failure of a life, lived under false images of what love and of what Daisy were supposed to be like. Gatsby sacrificed his life for a delusion, he kept on believing in a dream which had no real support. The end of the novel reveals the fact that the dream is over. Gatsby probably finally realized the illusion in which he had been trapped. So, the description of the way Gatsby is murdered is vague and is seen through Nick's eyes (Fitzgerald 2013, 208). The reader can only imagine how things evolved between Gatsby and George; we are not told. Ambiguity is also used in the narrative, when describing Lily's death, because at some point there is no certainty on the reason why Lily dies. Ambiguity is used both by Wharton and Fitzgerald and it gives a chance to the reader to imagine his own

version of the facts. Both in *The House of Mirth* and in *The Great Gatsby*, the story is told by a narrator, one that, as we can find out until the end of each novel, has not a special interest in money. Also, money is involved in both stories, as the lack of it drives Lily towards despair and death and it is money and social position that drive Daisy to leave with Tom, and not return to Gatsby. The latter gets killed and the killer commits suicide, without the opportunity of knowing the truth. On the other hand, Myrtle dies too, being killed by Daisy, and money is involved again, as Myrtle is interested in Tom because of money. The end of the novels are expressing a tough critique against the way society works, ruled by this money desire, as it is money which drives the characters towards a sad faith.

Comparing Daisy and Lily, in the way they consider money having an important role in their lives, Daisy is the type of woman who is unhappy in her marriage but she does not want to leave Tom. As a couple they create a lot of tension which can be easily perceived by the others. For instance, while Nick was visiting, even though they did not know each other very well as both Nick and Daisy admit, the visitor is able to sense based on their looks and on their conversation that their marriage is not a happy one:

“Did you give Nick a little heart-to-heart talk on the veranda?” demanded Tom suddenly.

[...] “Don’t believe everything you hear, Nick,” he advised me. (Fitzgerald 2013, 25)

Daisy and Tom do not make an effort to hide their distrust and their problems. The sarcasm from Tom’s words can be intensely felt, as Tom is mocking Daisy, this showing the ill opinion men usually have on women. It also shows disrespect towards both Nick and Daisy. He knows Daisy is aware of the fact he is cheating on her and he thinks she confesses it to Nick. He discredits his wife’s sayings by telling Nick not to believe everything he heard. Fitzgerald criticizes thus the rich by exposing these lines told by Tom. On the other hand, Lily

wants from a marriage to be happy as well. On the first place in her plans there is money, but after it, there is also happiness. She always considers she can reject a few men because a girl can always do better. Both women desire money, but Daisy would do anything for it in the end, even get away with murder, when Lily is more tempered and wise and chooses another path on which she does not hurt the others.

Both novels end in tragedies and the critic Sharon Kim considers they are caused by “moral dissolution” or “materialism”. Gatsby and Lily end up dead, and the role that money could have had vanishes:

The “tragic implication” of a frivolous society is that it is an environment, one that provides an inferior culture for the individual body to absorb and one that reinforces degraded traits by calling them into use. (Kim 2006, 189)

Kim discusses *The House of Mirth* and states that Lily is a part of a society which was responsible for the poor “culture” it provided at the time. Because of the lack of proper cultural environment, people prefer types of behavior which are harming the others. The critic is right, as both novels show different kinds of actions which prove to be harmful for others. And money is not excluded from neither one of them, being a tool in hurting the characters. For instance, it is because of money that Lily is banished from the high class and it is for money that Daisy does not go with the man she could have been happy with. As a result, Fitzgerald and Wharton create these situations in which characters pursue money to criticize the means through which they achieve it and at the same time to criticize the reasons which stand behind their way of acting.

In conclusion, money is a very important factor to which all the main characters revolve. Gatsby wants to have money to impress Daisy and to win her back, Daisy wants Tom’s money and his social status position because she is influenced by the society she lives in and Myrtle becomes Tom’s mistress because she also wants more money and the power

and social status which come with it. Secondly, Lily Bart desires to regain her lost fortune by means of her beauty and through marriage, Lily's cousin wants her aunt's money and does not share it with Lily, Bertha Dorset stays married to her husband because of his money, Gus wants to exchange money for sexual favors. So, money is the element which tests the conscience of the characters, being the only lasting factor in the process of degradation and death. To sum it up, the authors create in their works a critique of a society that only pursues money, this process being a complex one, which develops throughout the stories. The characters are built so that they perceive money as a must for a suitable life. This characteristic can be seen in Gatsby, Daisy, Myrtle, or Lily or Bertha or even Mrs. Peniston, whose actions are most of the time influenced by money. Because they know money means power, the power to feel superior or the power to afford a comfortable life:

Power in *The House of Mirth*, many critics have suggested, is patriarchal. They are right, no doubt, about the basis for power, insofar as power is economic and insofar as money making is a male prerogative, but the actual wielders of power in the book are often not men but women. (Dimock 1985, 784)

Wharton exposes the fact that men are the only ones capable of making real money, but women succeed in making money by marrying the men who have it. Therefore, although power in *The House of Mirth* is "patriarchal", women know how to get it too. In Dimock's statement that "power is economic", she affirms the fact that money means power. In those times, a person was considered to be powerful if she had money. Things are the same in *The Great Gatsby*. The characters are revolving around money because they want a better social position. They think money brings happiness and they are so eager to get it that they let their lives perverted only by interests.

II. The Class Hierarchy of Women and Its Critique in *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby*

1. Women's Social Stability and Mobility in *The House of Mirth*

Women are constituted in social classes in *The House of Mirth*, having different features, activities and ways of behavior: the high class, constituted by rich women, the middle class, where working women are a part of and the lower class, which is constituted by poor women. In this novel, the high class is presented the most; high-class women are built up like a compact group which will not accept outsiders, will not integrate them as their own and will treat everyone else as inferiors who suit their needs. The exception, like a boat drifting away from the upper class to the lower class, is Lily Bart. By losing her social position which money brought her, she finds herself trapped with no other options than those of adjusting (but she does not find the way to do so).

This section will study all the strategies and ways by which Wharton builds the upper class women and the battle of Lily Bart amid them. Regarding women's studies, some of the critics had preferred to opt for studying only one social class (for instance Eileen Connell's study, *Edith Wharton joins the working classes: The house of mirth and The New York City working girls' club*). Other critics chose to study certain types of behaviors, not necessarily women's (James Gargano's *The House of Mirth: Social Futility and Faith*). This part of my thesis will follow throughout these researches and the novel only in order to investigate which

are the characteristics of the female characters so that I can bring a fresh image of the way female social class is perceived in *The House of Mirth*. Also, this will show other techniques through which Wharton realizes a class critique in the novel.

Wharton creates female characters that represent three different classes: middle, upper and lower class. To describe the class difference, she offers to the reader characters such as: Bertha Dorset as representative for the upper class, Lily Bart for the middle class and Nettie Struther for the lower class. Lily is a complex character who oscillates through the book between those three classes. Through Lily's class mobility the reader can see how Wharton expresses disagreement with gender roles and against society's expectations. Lily cannot fit any of those three social classes. She has to adapt as being different than the others is out of discussion when society has such strict requirements from a woman. Middle and upper class women do not have specific jobs, they stay home and organize parties, charitable work, take care of themselves and meet other women from the same class. On the other hand, lower class women are framed as work women in factories, with a low income. All women in the book of Wharton are used to a certain type of behavior and they do not ask questions regarding their role into society. McDowell studies the novel from the points of view expressed by the feminist theories and points out the submissive role of women to society's demands:

Wharton characteristically reveals her feminism by insistently posing questions about women and the roles which society expects them to play. She makes few strong statements, draws few sure conclusions, and expresses few strenuous demands for change. The answers which the women in her fiction find are always tentative. In her novels they develop - or fail to develop - largely as a result of questions which they ask themselves (and the men they love) about their identity and about society's demands upon them. (McDowell 1974, 529)

This critic affirms that the novel is actually a display of real problems which society is facing in that period and Wharton is hiding some questions behind the presented situations. McDowell believes the novel is a disguise for Wharton's feminist ideas, which are hidden behind her characters. I think McDowell is right and I believe that women are caged in patterns that society had set for them and Wharton shows an interest in this subject, as she explores it in her other novels as well. That is the explanation of the critic's affirmation according to which women do not seek a way out. That is why they do not ask for answers. They are so used to the way things are, that they do not believe there is something wrong in the first place. By presenting this aspect, Wharton creates a social class critique, as this type of behavior is failing in obtaining freedom for women from the strains of the society.

McDowell presents a perspective according to which *The House of Mirth* is a feminist writing and Peter Barry approaches feminist theories as well in criticizing the novel. So, the issue in question is whether the novel is a feminist statement. It is true that society undermines women and offers them an inferior place into society. For instance, to get married was a significant action in a woman's life, because it designated her social and her wealth status. She could not make it on her own unless she had a considerable fortune and Lily's example is the most eloquent:

Feminists pointed out, for example, that in nineteenth century fiction very few women worked for a living, unless they are driven to it by dire necessity. Instead, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, which will decide her ultimate social position and exclusively determine her happiness and fulfillment in life, or her lack of these. (Barry 2002, 84)

The working class is not so present in Wharton's novel. Instead, like Peter Barry is affirming, the fiction is focused on Lily Bart's efforts to find a proper husband who can establish her well-being. The heroine is presented throughout the novel while searching for a marriage

partner, in order to regain her social status. Lily behaves the way society has taught her because women are created to be objects, attachments to a man's image. If the man is wealthy, so will the woman be; if not, her lack of "happiness and fulfillment in life" will be thus emphasized. One of the novel's messages is that women should not accept to becoming objects in the society's vision and this is one of the many reasons *The House of Mirth* can be considered a feminist text. I agree with the idea that the novel has many characteristics of a feminist novel. But I also think it is more complex than being just that. It also creates the image of integrity through most of Lily's decisions, in a world where everything falls apart, where happiness is so hard to achieve, being sold for illusions and money. Lily is the exception to the rule. She refuses to deceive herself and the others by giving into a relationship which would have destroyed her dignity. She does not want to offer sexual favors for money, even when she is asked from directly. Lily prefers so return those money and does not make any compromises that would trouble her conscience in the end. So, *The House of Mirth* is a feminist book as well as a story which goes beyond the feminist theories, in building some valid values, like responsibility and honesty which cannot be demolished by the rules conveyed by society. True moral values are shown by the displaying of all the mischievous behaviors. The author does not have to announce the wrong conduct as it announces itself through the simple fact it is presented.

Lily becomes an outsider to the society formed by women who got used to a treatment which lacks consideration and trust in their intellectual abilities. Even if at first she is a part of them, trying to listen to her mother and find a husband using her beauty, her behavior proves as the fiction develops, that she withdraws little by little from this perverted society: "Perhaps, as Judith Fetterley suggests, 'she cannot project herself as a wife, she cannot imagine life after the plunge because she cannot finally face the price she would have to pay for it: acceptance of a system which makes of her an object and treats her as a possession' (Fetterley 205)"

(Restuccia 1987, 229). Fetterley believes that by the way Wharton created her characters is an indicator to the reader so that he would understand the feminist message; by accepting the conceptions of women's role in society, one accepts that women become material things, they return to primordial times. Wharton might have used the stereotypes of women when creating the characters, in order to highlight her satirical point of view against the system and even more, against the "acceptance of a system" like that one.

To go deeper into the subject of how female society is functioning, I will discuss how the upper class women are presented in the novel. One of them is Bertha, who takes advantage of being rich in treating people in a disregarding way. The best example is her husband, whom she cheats without any consideration. The author presents Mrs Trenor who, in her discussion with Lily, shows the real nature of Bertha Dorset: an upper class woman, full of moral hypocrisy and of an extramarital affairs' history:

'[Bertha] delights in making people miserable, and especially poor George'.

[...] 'Oh, George is not as dismal as you think. If Bertha didn't worry him he would be quite different. Or if she'd leave him alone, and let him arrange his life as he pleases. But she doesn't dare lose her hold of him on account of the money, and so when *he* isn't jealous she pretends to be.' (Wharton 2008, 45)

Bertha is a person who enjoys spending her husband's money. She does not respect him and from Mrs Trenor's words, she is hypocrite as she pretends to love him and to be jealous just to keep him in their marriage. Besides her dependence on her husband's money, she finds a great pleasure in "making (other) people miserable". By treating George the way she does, she makes his life an unhappy one. She is selfish and does not want to let her husband "arrange his life as he pleases", but she finds the same pleasure regarding other characters too and she reaches her malicious aims against Lily. I think Mrs Trenor's judgment is right, as Bertha succeeds in throwing Lily out of the high society after she uses her to distract George,

while she has an affair with Ned Silverton. Bertha denigrates Lily's image by accusing her of having an affair with George. In order to keep herself on the surface, Bertha has the talent of sinking the ones that she does not need. So, Bertha has a bad character and being a part of the upper class helps her in succeeding to make the others suffer much easier.

Being rich, representing the high class, brings a position of superiority and Bertha derives benefit from it. She allows herself to be mean to George, her husband, just because she sees him as an inferior weak being. She cannot let him go, as Mrs Trenor says, because of the money. She does not appreciate him as a man, but rather as a source of money. McDowell argues that Bertha is behaving in such a way only because society has taught her that way. She is a direct product of the society she lives in: "Bertha Dorset in *The House of Mirth* domineers over men and is cruel and unfaithful with impunity, because she has learned that society overlooks a woman's sexual behavior so long as she is secretive." (McDowell 1974, 528-29). According to McDowell, not only is Bertha Dorset harming the others, but she is also free of any chances of being punished. A keyword in McDowell's opinion is "impunity", which proves that the character is so protected by the society for being an upper class woman that she does not need to be scared of any penalties. So, Bertha is influenced by the other upper class people's customs, who have taught her, according to the critic that it is ok to behave improperly as long as you keep it a secret. I think McDowell is right, as no one in the novel judges Bertha in a way which could bring harmful consequences for her. I also believe that it is not only society that influences Bertha; her personality is as well driving her to hurt the others through her behavior. Because even though Lily starts on the same path, respecting society's rules, she changes course, realizing that it is more important to conserve her dignity than to be rich. So, by creating Bertha's character, Wharton criticizes the hypocrisy that was one of the main characteristic of the nineteenth century's relationship between sexes. Bertha is hypocrite in her behavior towards her husband and Lily. She pretends to be a loving wife

(becomes jealous when she is afraid her husband might lose interest in her) and a good friend (she invites Lily on the ship *Sabrina*); as soon as she feels she no longer the need to worry about her husband, she cheats on him and when she decides she does not need Lily anymore, she invents a lie about her and she refuses to have her back on the boat.

Women like Bertha Dorset are not idealized by Wharton and in the novel, they have the tendency of being dynamic and they make use of manipulation. As McDowell affirms, society's eyes are closed when an imposing woman has an affair, as long as "she is secretive", and Wharton shows her disagreement towards such a society. Bertha is not as "handsome" nor as "clever" as Lily, but she is "nasty", rich and thus belonging to the high-class, this attributes being enough to justify her success, as it is stated by Mrs Trenor: "Everyone knows you're a thousand times handsomer and cleverer than Bertha; but then you're not nasty" (Wharton 2008, 45). The fact a woman has to be "nasty" to succeed in obtaining what she wants creates an image of a society that is based on guidelines which do not have included values, such as respecting the individuals. Wharton criticizes this world, exposing her mechanisms through this scene.

The next subject I will discuss is connected to the way the low class is presented by Wharton. The example of a low-class woman is Nettie Struther, who although she does not have money, finds contentment in something else: "[Nettie Struther] was a poorly-dressed young woman with a bundle under her arm. Her face had the air of unwholesome refinement which ill-health and over-work may produce, but its common prettiness was redeemed by the strong and generous curve of the lips." (Wharton 2008, 303). Nettie is a character through which Wharton highlights the fact that a poor person can have a normal life. Even though she does not have fancy clothes, Nettie's prettiness stays not in her expensive clothes, but in her smile, in the "generous curve of the lips". Wharton thus criticizes the conception that house-keepers are insipid women. She shows her simple beauty through the description presented.

Ironically, Nettie appears so late in the book to save Lily, after Nettie herself has been saved by Lily at a certain point. I see Nettie as a symbol of happiness and modesty too; she is the living proof for Lily that a happy family can be achieved by the lower class: “The strength of the victory shone forth from her as she lifted her irradiated face from the child on her knees” (Wharton 2008, 307). Mrs Struther proves a woman can be happy without having money, this happiness being inspired by her family, by the “child on her knees”. The feeling of joy can be seen, as it brings light to Nettie’s “irradiated face”. In my opinion, Wharton created such a character as Nettie at the end of the book to bring an example of the idealized woman in the nineteenth century. A simple woman, not ashamed to work and to show her natural charm and especially her power to step back from the poison of society’s expectations, appears ideally in the end, as a contrast with all the other ones who are only wrapped in hypocrisy.

Another independent woman, who is also an atypical character, created in the novel is Gerty Farish who is a social worker and owns an apartment. This is not seen with good eyes by the high class. Her life is different and the high-class ladies think her less only because she does not have a sufficient number of servants. Gerty does not care for their opinion though and does not renounce to the life she has chosen for herself. At the beginning of the novel, she is mentioned in a talk between Lily and Selden:

‘I even know a girl who lives in a flat.’ [...]

‘Oh, I know – you mean Gerty Farish.’ She smiled a little unkindly. ‘But I said *marriageable* – and besides, she has a horrid little place, and no maid, and such queer things to eat. Her cook does the washing and the food tastes of soap. I should hate that, you know.’ (Wharton 2008, 9)

Gerty Farish, Selden’s cousin, is the example of an atypical character in *The House of Mirth*. Gerty has no such wishes as joining the social elite, she is not wealthy and the only thing that connects her to the upper classes is her cousin Selden and her charities. Being unlike the other

characters, Gerty comes to be the antithesis of Lily and in the same time the shoulder that Lily can cry on. The fact that Wharton builds a rejected character represented by Gerty shows the shallow values which represent the society. The high class does not approve her life style and the word “marriageable” used by Wharton proves that this working lady is totally banished from the high society and has no chance to find a proper husband. Lily clearly explains it to Selden. The author exposes the fact that there is a price if a woman wishes to be independent. Gerty has a flat and she does not have servants so she will not be able to find a husband. She is the image of independence and I believe that Wharton uses her character to send the message that freedom comes with a price, the total rejection of the society, which has rules that cannot be broken. Not following the routines of the high class, society offers Gerty the possibility of taking her own decisions and not being influenced by anyone: “I forgot she was your cousin. But we’re so different, you know: she likes being good, and I like being happy. And besides, she is free and I am not. If I were, I dare say I could manage to be happy even in her flat.” (Wharton 2008, 9). Gerty is a character that succeeds only by letting go the conceptions that surround her. She does not need a wealthy husband, she is not even “marriageable” and by being independent, she gets free; “free” of society’s chains, those chains in which Lily is strongly trapped for a time and which would not let her live happily unless she complies herself to the rules society has set. Lily’s choice of words is really interesting in this excerpt, as she differentiates goodness from happiness. The main character understands perfectly that a person cannot be happy if she chooses to be good. To achieve happiness one needs to behave like the others. This might mean that the behavior is not particularly an honest one: “she likes being good and I like being happy”. Lily assumes without knowing Gerty that she is not happy with her actual position. So, Lily, being at the first half of the novel deeply involved into the world of the high class, knows and respects the

rules. She thinks that in order for Gerty to be free, she needs to be good, the disadvantage being her inability to be happy.

Lily acknowledges the chain that bounds her to the society's unbreakable rules and cannot suppress its pressure. Although the high class does not care about Gerty's happiness, she has the advantage of being free, which cannot be said about Lily. On the other hand, Wharton builds Gerty's character to criticize her, as McDowell surprisingly affirms:

Wharton in her early work is surprisingly ironic at the expense of independent women who pursue careers, like Gerty Farish, the social worker in *The House of Mirth* [...]. For Wharton a woman must exist as a conventionally feminine presence (McDowell 1974, 524).

McDowell believes that Wharton is ironic towards the presence of Gerty Farish and that a woman should behave the way every other woman behaves for her to be perceived as a part of the society. I think the critic is right as Wharton criticizes Gerty Farish through the characters from the high class she creates. For instance Lily is ironic to the existence of Gerty, and she is also representing the high class in not considering Gerty one of them. I think her character is created by Wharton in order to criticize the way the society formed by female figures thinks. Gerty Farish is not a joke, she is a woman who behaves differently and for that does not get accepted by the society.

Lily Bart is an exception in the novel, as she struggles through all three social classes. After her family loses what should have become her fortune, she tries to make use of her beauty, as her mother has taught her, to find a wealthy husband and to recover the money that had been lost: "She remembered how her mother, after they had lost their money, used to say to her with a kind of fierce vindictiveness: 'But you'll get it all back – you'll get it all back, with your face'..." (Wharton 2008, 29-30). According to Lily's mother, one should make use of the beauty to climb the social scale. Wharton created Lily, a character unable to make

decisions at the right time, as she pushes Selden away more than once, to show that a woman should not accept those men, only because they have money which can “buy sexual gratification” (McDowell 1974, 528). Misses Bart’s words prove that appearances are all that matter in a world of opportunists. Lily needs her “face”, meaning her beautiful features to attract a man; she does not need to be kind or honest. This remark has actually a much larger significance, for it describes not only the way Lily can succeed in gaining a big fortune by marrying a rich husband, but it also outlines the rules the high society guides itself: upper class ladies exchange social courtesy visits, attend and plan parties, without any real feelings interchanges. According to Lily’s mother, she must sell herself, as the high-class women sell their fake gestures, for money and a social position.

Another point of discussion, linked to the above idea, is the means through which upper class women relate to their family. It seems that Lily’s mother has had a marriage of convenience and like Bertha Dorset, she is egocentric: “She had no tolerance for scenes which were not of her own making, and it was odious to her that her husband should make a show of himself before the servants.” (Wharton 2008, 33). Wharton goes into the past and presents some scenes between Lily’s family members. Her mother is a woman used to having control, not only of her own actions, but of her husband’s. As Wharton puts it, Lily’s mother does not seem to love her husband and looks like she is annoyed with everything he does. When she learns he has lost all the money, her ability to stand his presence ceases and she starts to reproach him. She does not support him and her only thoughts are to point Lily in a direction in which she can recover the fortune through the means of marriage. By presenting this, the author shows women are expected to find a husband and they are educated towards that decision from an early age. Once they are married and they have a social position and a fortune to enjoy, their main remaining concerns are organizing the events and attending them.

Upper class women do not have other occupation besides organizing events and socializing. Also, the parties are the perfect occasion to gossip, to meet new people and to chitchat. Lily is not that kind of person and proves it when asked by Mrs. Peniston, Lily's aunt to tell her who went to the wedding she attended, she avoids to give an answer: "Really, Lily, I don't see why you took the trouble to go to the wedding, if you don't remember what happened or whom you saw there. When I was a girl I used to keep the *menu* of every dinner I went to, and write the names of the people on the back'." (Wharton 2008, 107). Julia Peniston is a typical high class woman who does not have other concerns than speaking about other people, gossiping becoming a necessary activity. She thus criticizes Lily because her niece does not give her the details she is interested about. She is a shallow person, as Bertha, and makes a big fuss about the fact that Lily will not tell her some gossip. By describing how she used to keep the menu of every dinner she attended and to write all the names of the persons who were there and by blaming Lily she does not do the same, Mrs. Peniston proves she did not change as time went by. Wharton creates this type of character to criticize the fact that she lacks kindness (as she disinherits Lily just because she does not consider that she behaves herself as a woman who is part of the high class) and to disapprove a society in which one is rejected (by disinheriting her, Mrs. Peniston rejects Lily as being an upper class and also her family) because one does not follow the imposed rules.

Another important aspect of the novel which deserves to be discussed is the way the upper class women behave towards the lower class women. Lily's aunt does not hesitate to show her superiority towards the servants, without any consideration to their work: "I knew it – the parlour-maid never dusts there!' she exclaimed, triumphantly displaying a minute spot on the handkerchief" (Wharton 2008, 107). The inclination that Mrs. Peniston is showing to details signifies she does not have much to do with her time. She rejoices with her discovery that there was some dirt on the furniture, and accuses the maid in front of Lily without any

consideration. She is not used to treating the lower class women with respect and from her reaction it seems she has taken some time to spy on the maid. When she says to Lily “I knew it”, she proves to have had some suspicions before confirming them. The word “triumphantly”, which accompanies her action of displaying the dirty handkerchief shows that she is happy with her discovery, being proud to have found something bad the maid has done. She has thus the chance to gossip about it and maybe to reproach it to the maid. By presenting this conversation between Lily and her aunt, Wharton shows a disagreement to the way the lower class is being treated by the upper class. Another example is the way Lily perceives Nettie Crane at first: “She had known Nettie Crane as one of the discouraged victims of over-work and anæmic parentage: one of the superfluous fragments of life destined to be swept prematurely into that social refuse-heap of which Lily had so lately expressed her dread” (Wharton 2008, 304). This is how Lily, while she had been a part of the upper class, has perceived Nettie. She expected Nettie to be “swept into that social refuse-heap”, only because she was a poor working woman. Upper class women cannot see a bright future in the life of any of the lower class women: being poor – this is not a way of living, nor a life. Nettie, though, is an excellent example in the book that shows a person of her condition can have a normal life. Wharton uses a technique here through which she realizes a class critique by presenting the way the upper class women perceive lower class women. The author criticizes the upper class for being too trenchant against women who are part of the lower society.

The final question that remains to be asked in this chapter is whether this situation which Lily finds herself in is built by Wharton as a result of Lily’s own choices or one decided by fate. As a traveler through all social classes, from being rich to poor, I think Wharton does not create Lily to evolve in a direction from which she could benefit because she cannot answer important questions: “She was so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her, that the links of her bracelet seemed like manacles chaining her to

her fate. [...] It was a hateful fate – but how to escape from it? What choice had she? To be herself, or a Gerty Farish” (Wharton 2008, 9, 27). The thoughts express her strong believe that she is a product of the society she has lived in, and not of her choices. It may be an attempt to comfort herself because the choices she has made have not taken her in the desired direction. She thinks that society has pushed her towards her choices and so, the main female character from the novel puts on the same place fate with society. This is very intriguing since Lily is not a character that lacks a force of decision. She can say no to Gus Trenor’s sexual demands, she does not follow through her way of behaving the high class customs, but the author does not create her in order to be able to let go of money. The answer to the question “What choice had she? To be herself, or a Gerty Farish”, offers the image of a Lily who does not even know her true self. Wharton offers the image of a Lily who does not know she cannot be herself in the high class, as the characters who are part of it are inclined to manipulate and to be hypocrite. Lily is not built to be like this and her behavior proves it. For instance the letters she has for blackmailing Bertha are not used for this purpose in the end. The alternative for Lily is to be a Gerty Farish, who has a lot of qualities, which are not seen by Lily. The latter is convinced she cannot escape fate and she tries to reconcile with it. I think Wharton creates a main female character who is influenced by society in order to establish that is not fate driving people, but our own choices, or the lack of choices. This technique of inserting Lily’s inability to choose, to act for her own without breaking her moral values, is used by Wharton till the very end, where it is not clear if Lily commits suicide or if she takes too many pills by mistake.

As her opinion about herself, according to which fate is the one determining her life, the author leaves the possibility in the final chapter of the second book, where death comes without the reader knowing if it is summoned or not, as if Lily did not make the choice, but only fate caused her death. Wharton uses ambiguity as the text does not offer clear clues to

the reader of whether Lily commits suicide or not. Her desire to sleep for a long time can be a metaphor for the sleep of death, but there is no clear evidence in this direction. Lily's death could mean the fact she finally freed herself from the prejudices and rules of the women's classes. Through her death, Wharton realizes also a class critique in the way that she presents an end for Lily, a character that was not able to conform into the society she lived in. By refusing her the right of being a part of the society, by abandoning her, women who were supposed to be her family (her aunt) or her friends (Bertha for instance) push her towards desolation and finally death.

In conclusion, society has the tendency in Wharton's *The House of Mirth* to create women who do not ask questions about their own moral behavior; they prefer to talk about the others' mistakes, to judge and to condemn without any remorse. Lily Bart, the main character is a victim of her own actions, which are influenced by the high class society. Money and social position denigrate women, bringing them to act in a similar way, uniting them under a huge tent, thus forming a whole which manipulates and cheats, gossips and hurts, without any sorry feelings. In fact there are no genuine feelings involved at all in their relationships. For instance, even though Bertha assumes to be a friend of Lily's, turns her back on her. The high-class people are created by the author to be merciless and when they throw someone out, it is very hard to be accepted again. The low-class people are the free ones, but this freedom is not perceived by the high class. They are the opposite of the upper class, generous and kind, helpful and merciful. Lily is built to represent the individual of the society who is a rebel. Wharton does not present her as a character who manages to remain a part of the upper class, or who can work at the workhouse, proving thus that nineteenth century's society would not encourage people who were unable to follow its unwritten rules.

2. The Power of Women's Social Class in *The Great Gatsby*

This chapter argues the way that female characters are outlined in terms of social class by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*. Female characters are divided by the author into high-class women, class in which women like Jordan and Daisy are included, and the middle class women, from which Myrtle is a part of. The most explored class is the upper class, as the main female character, Daisy, is a part of it.

Critics have debated the role of women regarding different matters such as the 'American Dream' (Michael Millgate's paper, *Scott Fitzgerald as Social Novelist: Statement and Technique in 'The Great Gatsby'*) or their relation with the social background at the beginning of the twentieth century (Ronald Berman's paper *The Great Gatsby and the Twenties*), but they have not discussed as much the female characters' role in this exact type of society. Millgate states that by "exposing, in the revelation of Daisy's character, the tawdriness of what the dream aspires to, Fitzgerald clearly intended a fundamental criticism of the 'American Dream'" (Millgate 1962, 336). The critic presents the complex aspirations of Daisy towards money and her plans and actions regarding her social position are reduced by Millgate to Fitzgerald's intent to criticize the 'American Dream'. But how do upper class women relate to each other? How do upper class women relate to middle class women? How do women try to change the compartmentalization of the social classes? These are few of the questions which have not been answered exhaustively by the critics who approached the subject. This section of the present thesis intends to explore the above mentioned issues, creating at the same time a better understanding of the global meaning of the novel.

The critic who contributes to unveiling most of the answers concerning the topics I am pursuing is Maggie Gordon Froehlich, who although states great interest in presenting “the role patriarchal capitalism plays in the construction of sexuality” (Froehlich 2011, 209), succeeds through the contrast technique to unravel important aspects of women’s society. The critic underlines the fact ‘The Great Gatsby’ presents a men’s world, in which women represent an inferior group which is constantly undermined. Also, she outlines the fact that money plays a big part in the relationships women choose to have. So, are women seeking marriages of convenience and are they establishing the foundation of a relationship on the commodities money brings? According to Froehlich, women are treated by men as goods which are dispensable any time (Froehlich 2011, 216). The feminine characters accept silently the treatment they are given as “social judgment matters more” (Berman 2001, 79). If they rose and made noise about the injustice which ruled their world, they would have to be ready to face other people’s judgment. The submissive behavior conveys the significance of a dominant gender: the male gender. I believe every time the man thinks the woman made a step too far, a step he would not be able to supervise, he tries to regain control by reducing the woman to an inferior being who should obey. For instance Tom tells Nick not to believe everything Daisy says (Fitzgerald 2013, 25) and when Myrtle repeats Daisy’s name more than once, disobeying Tom, he slaps her (Fitzgerald 2013, 48). Both Daisy and Myrtle are set here on a low position from where they cannot make any decisions without consequences. Gatsby is no exception, but in a different way, as he tries to get rich to impress Daisy and to win her back. So Daisy is also seen as a product, as Gatsby tries to ‘buy’ her.

Furthermore, in *The Great Gatsby* women are portrayed as being eager to get married. Also, women do not seek love as much as economic stability in marriage. The society in the 1920s is inclined to put pressure on the family link and this is one of the reasons why Nick Carraway chooses to leave the Midwest and move to New York. The social tension can be so

intense that Nick chooses to fight it by moving to another city. The character lets himself be influenced by the society. The same thing happens to women, who abandon themselves in the influence society bears. The masculine character, who is also the narrator, is presented by Froehlich as a man who wants to come “to terms with an American social order delimited by patriarchal capitalism”. The fact American society is dominated by a patriarchal order shows the fact that women have an inferior position. The system is dominated by men, this leaving the female characters to occupy lower positions than men:

[...] (Nick) he’s also in New York so that he may enjoy the company of men and to escape the increasing social expectations back in the Midwest, where he is being cajoled to marry. [...] his road to West Egg and to the wealth, power, and privilege he enjoys there – is about coming to terms with an American social order delimited by patriarchal capitalism in which there is little possibility for authentic love or desire separate from the economic realm. (Froehlich 2011, 210)

Froehlich outlines the fact that society in the twenties was built on a social order which was empowered by patriarchal capitalism, meaning women did not have many rights. Women were not leaders, men were, and moreover, this establishment left out the possibility of real love. In an economic world, led by men, women try to get benefits by taking advantage of the position marriage with an upper class man secures. Daisy marries Tom and Myrtle gets involved with Tom for the same reason – they are in search of an advantageous situation. Myrtle herself admits she regrets to have married George Wilson because he had no money (Fitzgerald 2013, 39).

The reason why women look rather for social stability than love is not because they are any different by men, but on the contrary, they are set this way by the society. Women do not have equal rights with men and the novel indicates this by not presenting any woman with a business career for example. The role of a woman is to take care of the family and to

entertain guests. The narrator often places Daisy as other women like Jordan or Myrtle, in scenes which involve parties or social gatherings. The feminine characters cannot achieve the same goals as men, even though they enter their world, the main means for that being marriage: “[...] in Fitzgerald’s critique, men’s relationships consist of political and business connections – and especially of the mentoring of young men by older men – rather than friendship or love”. (Froehlich 2011, 210-11). So, according to Froehlich, the values which men are taught are not those of tenderness and appreciation, but those of making political and business connections. Fitzgerald is criticizing thus the society, people being more focused on making money and they lose of mind true values. If women are seeking money in a relationship, men are no better for setting an example of moral values. For instance Daisy is marrying Tom for his wealth and social status, but Tom is no better as he cheats on her without any remorse.

I believe marriage between a man and a woman was many times just a cover-up for society. Marriage meant nothing but a façade for other things which presented importance for the characters. For women, marriage was the opportunity to save the appearances for the others, it offered social status and in Daisy’s case, a great financial future. In Myrtle’s case, things change as the marriage is not what she expected, or at least this is what she claims: ““The only CRAZY I was when I married him. I knew right away I made a mistake. He borrowed somebody’s best suit to get married in and never even told me about it, and the man came after it one day when he was out”” (Fitzgerald 2013, 39). Myrtle justifies her mistake of marrying George by his inability to buy a new wedding suit. The fact the groom suit had been borrowed, Myrtle judges her husband as being inadequate for being her lifetime partner. Fitzgerald creates through the conversations Myrtle has a woman who does not love her husband, her profile being perhaps that of a materialist person. Her marriage becomes after a while a cover-up for her secret meetings with Tom Buchanan. She wants to ascend to the

upper class and succeeds in seducing Tom although she is not ready for the position this new relationship offers. She does not know the rules which guide the high-class society so she does not behave in a proper way. This new position she is after gives her the excuse to cheat on her husband.

I believe marriage is presented in the novel as a necessary process in order to have a normal life in the eyes of those who are part of society. This way, Fitzgerald uses the character of Daisy, and not only, to criticize the lack of values and knowledge. Daisy prefers to act superficially in order to make social conversation and one example is the talk they had during Nick's first visit:

‘It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved.’ (Tom)

‘Tom’s getting very profound,’ said Daisy with an expression of unthoughtful sadness.

‘He reads deep books with long words in them.’ (Fitzgerald 2013, 16)

Apparently, for Daisy, being profound means the simple action of reading books with long words in them and not the understanding of the subjects the books dwells upon. Besides, Tom has not succeeded in making a point of view and sustaining it with arguments. Daisy's praise comes as a completion to the next scene in which she remains alone with Nick and tells him it's better to be seen as a fool because in this way you become immune to the pain others may cause (Fitzgerald 2013, 20).

The author presents the main female character, Daisy as being a hypocrite who is aware of it. She is wearing a mask while in society as much as possible. She is built by the narrator to hide behind the mask of a naive and an ignorant beauty and she wants the same type of behavior for her daughter: “‘All right,’ I said, ‘I’m glad it’s a girl. And I hope she’ll be a fool—that’s the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool.’” (Fitzgerald 2013, 22). Beneath her sayings, Fitzgerald actually criticizes the way women are seen in the

society, the way the others perceive women, on the one hand, and on the other the way these perceptions influence women's behavior.

The opinion according to which a girl should be beautiful and foolish is connected to the belief that only this is the way for a woman to be happy. If she ignores things that might hurt her she will be able to find joy and peace. For instance, she willingly ignores Tom's affair, she does not divorce him. Daisy is aware of the fact Tom is having an affair, so she is not ignorant; none the less, she is not content. Also, Tom's notion of Daisy is the same as hers; he makes a show of his affair through the phone which does not seem to stop ringing during Nick's visit. Also, he does not respect either Nick or Daisy when he offers Nick to show him "his girl". So, the image of the woman starts building itself in the novel from the beginning and it is that of beauty but also of ignorance. She is treated as such by the others and so, she starts to think of herself in the same way. Tom is the symbol of all the other men with money and power who have basically the same behavior. Referring to Myrtle, her image does not change in terms of how Tom treats her. Scott Donaldson thinks there is a difference between Daisy and Myrtle in terms of how they are treated by the men in their lives and regarding their way to act accordingly. Myrtle is the kind of woman who pays a price to climb into a higher social class. She is presented by Fitzgerald as being married to a man she does not love and she is the kind of woman who wants more from life. So when Tom Buchanan shows interest in her charms she does not put on hold her plans of seducing him and trying to take the leap to the upper class:

Married to the pallid proprietor of a gas station in the ash-heaps, Myrtle must cross a vast social divide to reach the territory of the upper class. Her smoldering sensuality enables her to attract Tom Buchanan, and in the small apartment on West 158th Street that Tom rents as a place of assignation, she pitifully attempts to put on airs. But what Myrtle buys and plans to buy during the Sunday party in Chapter Two tellingly reveals

her status. She aims for extravagance, but has had no experience with it. (Donaldson 2001, 192)

According to the critic, although Myrtle claims to be a part of the high society, she is not ready for it. She does not know how to pull the strings in her favor, as Tom will never be convinced by his relationship with her to leave Daisy. So, the position Myrtle occupies in Tom's life is not a very advantageous one:

Among Myrtle's purchases, the dog of indeterminate breeding best symbolizes her own situation. She is, for Tom, a possession to be played with, fondled, and in due course ignored. [...] The connection between Myrtle and the dog as creatures to be kept under restraint is underlined by the collar she plans to buy, and by the expensive leather-and-silver leash her husband discovers on her bureau, arousing his suspicions. (Donaldson 2001, 193)

The way Tom treats Myrtle implies the same attitude he has towards Daisy. She is a possession, one that can be bought as easily as it can be dismissed. He likes to brag about it, to show it to the others, to receive praise for it and he is willing to act nicely with it once in a while. None the less, he but needs a pretense to be mischievous. When Myrtle starts repeating Daisy's name, as a sign of disrespect, Tom slaps her (Fitzgerald 2013, 48). In doing so, he does not only show malice, but also hypocrisy as he had no right to judge Myrtle for disrespecting his wife, as he does the same. In presenting the episode in which Myrtle asks Tom to buy her the dog, Donaldson recognizes Tom's attitude as the one of a master aimed toward a slave. The critic thinks the leather-and-silver leash that makes George suspect something is a symbol of the real situation in which Myrtle finds herself. I agree and I think the critic is right, as the author creates Myrtle as a character who is at Tom's disposal. Whenever he wants, she is willing to meet him. She lies to her husband she goes to see her sister, when she actually goes to meet Tom (Fitzgerald 2013, 34).

Moving on to the other type of woman Donaldson thinks to find represented in the novel, there is Daisy, who although has part of the treatment Tom applies to Myrtle:

Tom was not unusual in regarding women as objects to be possessed – either temporarily, as in the case of Myrtle, or permanently, if like Daisy they warrant such maintenance through their beauty and background and way of presenting themselves to the world. (Donaldson 2001, 194)

The critic prefers to comment the treatment which, in his opinion, differentiates the two women. Even though Tom behaves in a poor way with both women, a slight difference being the period of time he invests in his possessions, Gatsby is the one who makes a difference, so Daisy is no longer perceived as a pile of goods, but as the woman who should receive anything she wants in exchange for her love. Because of this conception he makes his fortune but according to Donaldson, Daisy cares not only about the money, but about the social status too. Gatsby had a lot of money, but he didn't have a social position, so "what good were all those possessions if Daisy was not pleased?" (Donaldson 2001, 209). As the critic underlines it, Daisy does not know how to recognize a different type of behavior and shuts down to the opportunity to escape a life a misfortunes. In my opinion the critic left out the analysis of George's behavior toward his wife. I think Myrtle and Daisy are the same, in what concerns their way of acting as well as the image the others have on them.

Comparing the image George has on his wife, keeping in mind that he is willing to kill Gatsby, which he does, followed by the supreme gesture to take his own life, with the one Gatsby has on Daisy, being eager to offer anything for her love, even his life and innocence, I think these two women inspire the same form of devotion. By not accepting what Gatsby has to offer, Daisy does not leave Tom. On the other hand, by not accepting what George has to offer, Myrtle cheats on her husband, but without leaving him and so these two women find themselves again on common ground.

Another interesting opinion, which is not aimed towards the investigating of women's condition and role in society but does not exclude them, is that of John Fraser's, who contradicts Donaldson's opinion according to which there are two kinds of women and implicitly two kinds of behavior. Referring to the social conduct, the critic thinks there is only one type:

In *The Great Gatsby*, similarly, examples of a single pattern of conduct proliferate: the pretensions of Gatsby are in varying degrees echoed throughout it by virtually all the characters, including the Buchanans, the former owner of Gatsby's house, the haughty negro trio in their chauffeur-driven limousine, the whole crew at the brilliantly rendered affair at Myrtle Wilson's apartment, and presumably most of the guests at Gatsby's parties. (Fraser 1965, 557)

What Fraser is saying is that Daisy is not an exception for Gatsby, as he still sees her as an object which can be purchased with enough money. His guests, his servants, his chauffeur, they all indicate Gatsby got used to the lifestyle the others practice and so, although he might be more generous than other people, he still remains a classical model of man who treats the others as merchandise just because he has money. I do not agree with Fraser, as Gatsby is not used to treating the others as trade. It is true that he at his turn was used as such in the past but this does not mean he is treating the others in the same way. As the fiction develops, the story of a poor boy, Gatsby, who manages in making a huge fortune, is revealed to the readers, who learn he willingly let himself be seduced, giving his body to older men in order to succeed in pursuing his dream: "At seventeen, James Gatz meets Dan Cody, his first and most important mentor [...] (it) suggests a connection between Cody's exploitation of the land and his sexual exploitation of other human beings" (Froehlich 2011, 218). Following up, the critic affirms: "Gatz is an opportunist here, prostituting himself to achieve the success he desires. Presenting himself for service 'in a vague personal capacity' to the older Cody, Gatsby embodies the

term ‘trade’” (Froehlich 2011, 218). This relation leads Cody to include Gatsby in his will. If Gatsby does it for a personal purpose which does not include physical pleasure, Cody does it for this latter reason, without caring about his wife. So, Gatsby gets used and he receives money for this. He is caught in the exchange network described by the American society of the times.

On the other hand, women make decisions which are being used by the author to criticize the society formed by them. So, they have their part of guilt and the best examples are offered by the hit-and-run situation through which Daisy had been through and the sudden death of Cody, linked to the returning of his wife. Daisy runs Myrtle over and then, like an irresponsible person, flees the scene. This behavior of hers only completes the image that has been built from the beginning by the author. Daisy is part of a society which does not care, which does not have any prick of conscience even though a murder has been committed. Furthermore, the advantage Cody takes over young Gatsby’s condition is cut off by the first’s death: “The relationship only ends with the death of Cody, under mysterious circumstances related to the sudden appearance on the scene of the journalist Ella Kaye, who is secretly Cody’s wife.” (Froehlich 2011, 219). The critic makes too many suppositions, based on the few information that are offered in the novel. She assumes the wrongs Cody has done to his wife, like cheating on her with a younger boy are the reason of her punishment with death. The narrator does not specify clearly what the situation was really like, and he gives insufficient details for the reader to figure out exactly what happened. But the possibility leads to another killing, a mysterious one about which the reader does not find out exactly how it happened:

Cody’s death only days after her appearance suggests some kind of malfeasance, and it would make sense if it were a kind of disciplinary violence. [...] If Ella Kaye killed Cody because she was afraid of losing her position, she might have been correct: Cody

had already written Gatsby into his will. The «legacy of twenty-five thousand dollars» that Cody intended for Gatsby was lost, however, when Kaye sued over the bequest; the courts upheld the heterosexual veneer of patriarchal capitalism, overriding Cody's wish, and what remained of the millions went intact to Ella Kaye. (Froehlich 2011, 219)

What the critic explained is that money was playing an important role in Cody's wife's life so that when she apparently learns the truth about the fact that her inheritance is going to be given to Jay Gatsby, she takes the matter into her hands and takes care of it. She is determined and according to Froehlich, she represents the type of woman who would do anything for money, a corrupt being who, I think, is representative for the society she lives in. And even though I cannot agree totally with the critic, as I do not think the evidence given in the text is enough to believe that indeed Ella killed her husband, I do think that this sort of model for a morally corrupt behavior exists, best being impersonated by Daisy. Things do not stop here though as women's behavior is a consequence of the men's treatment. For instance the fact the patriarchal society does not allow middle class women to get rich by themselves, independently, drives Daisy to marry Tom.

Another significant point of discussion is the way women from the same social class relate to one another. The female characters from the high class communicate in a shallow way and do not have a sincere interaction. For instance, Daisy and Jordan talk at the same time even though they are friends, Jordan being Daisy's guest: "Sometimes she and Miss Baker talked at once, unobtrusively and with a bantering inconsequence that was never quite chatter, that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire" (Fitzgerald 2013, 15). The perceived indifference by the narrator proves their friendship is a fake one. The fact Fitzgerald presents the characters talking at once show a lack of respect towards each other. Also, the use of the comparison "she and Miss Baker

talked at once, [...] that was as cool as their white dresses and their impersonal eyes in the absence of all desire” shows the fact their talk lacked substance. There was no essence and Fitzgerald makes the difference between appearances and essence. There was no essence in their interaction, no “desire”. The way these conversations occur is related by the narrator as being discordant with the context. That is the reason why there can be no emotion in their tonality, boredom being the main enemy as long as their discussions are made only out as conventions.

Also, the female characters belonging to the high class do not consideration to one another. And this comes as a natural source to the fact they gossip one about another: “A subdued impassioned murmur was audible in the room beyond and Miss Baker leaned forward, unashamed, trying to hear. [...] ‘Why——’ she said hesitantly, ‘Tom’s got some woman in New York.’” (Fitzgerald 2013, 20) Even though Jordan is a guest of Daisy, the first does not hide in finding reasons to gossip about Daisy’s life. And although Nick is a stranger, who has no idea of the couple’s private life, he is introduced without any difficulties to its secrets. Jordan does not care about Nick’s presence, and even though the voices were indistinct, she does not hide her need to know about the others’ scandalous lives. When she learns that Nick is in the dark and does not even suspect of the affair Tom has in New York, Jordan takes the lead and tells him without any remorse. Her actions define her as a person who likes to gossip and has no respect for her friends’ intimacy.

Jordan is an exception of the high class, as she succeeds in being independent. Froehlich believes that “The lesson Nick learns from this ritual sacrifice (because of the patriarchal capitalism) is that he must follow the model of Jordan Baker, whose ‘careful’ (studied, composed, and sober) behavior allows her to live a life of economic and sexual independence” (Froehlich 2011, 223). The matter of interest followed by the critic becomes larger here, being the way Jordan succeeds in integrating herself in a men’s world. According

to the Froehlich's article, the sports girl manages to be free by her choice of conduct and becomes this way a model for Nick. What the critic does not say is that Jordan's ways are not always moral ones, but quite the opposite. She is the one who pushes Daisy into marrying Tom, so she drives Daisy to listen to the society's rules. Fitzgerald criticizes the way Jordan acts when she is around Daisy. By exposing her behavior, the author realizes a class critique. She is the type of character created not to care about the others as long as she is living the life chosen for herself.

Another subject of interest is high-class women's diplomatic sense of talking and entertaining guests, which is also a form of deceitfulness. Nick's first visit is described by the author in a way which shows Daisy is used to having guests. "She laughed again, as if she said something very witty, and held my hand for a moment, looking up into my face, promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see" (Fitzgerald 2013, 11). The way Daisy receives Nick shows the role women of her class used to play into the society. Their part was constrained most of the times inside the house. Visiting and be visited formed perfect models of hosts and visitors. The fact that Nick acknowledges that Daisy's laugh is fake, as she laughs in a way which does not correspond with the context, shows the criticism placed on the way certain manners are formed.

There is a weight that society puts on women for being ready to satisfy its demands. And this type of society is according to Froehlich, a patriarchal one, in which they cannot find room in the "logic of patriarchal capitalism and the machinations of homosocial exchange" (Froehlich 2011, 216). Women are not allowed as many liberties as men. For instance a woman cannot have a job which could make her rich. The situation is not to be changed until mentalities are changed and this is not soon to be happening in the world *The Great Gatsby* presents. The reality of the beginning of the twentieth century is noticed by the narrator and by creating the universe in which the characters act, exposes actually that only marriage can

transform a poor girl into a rich one. Daisy marries Tom so she becomes wealthy. The tragedy in this situation is that careers alone, without having a rich family to support them, will not bring money. The feminine characters cannot really intervene in the relations men create between themselves, as Froehlich herself admits:

Nick clearly understands the logic of patriarchal capitalism and the machinations of homosocial exchange, not merely because he works in stocks and bonds, but because he identifies the relationship between stocks and bonds, male bonding, and the bondage of slavery. He sees Gatsby's life, his transformation from the poor boy James Gatz to the wealthy and powerful Jay Gatsby, as a clear expression of the connections between the American Dream of economic success and ancient practices of slavery and homosexuality. (Froehlich 2011, 216)

The critic affirms that Nick understands the trajectory of Gatsby as a trail of compromises. Even though it is a forbidden access for women, this world is not easy to live in. Gatsby has to return the favors and since he cannot return them with money, he gives in to the homosexual practices. So, the fact the novel is a critic of the American Dream also exposes the sacrifices one must do in order to live it. This society of exchanges creates a domino effect. The fact that Gatsby had to be a slave before he was a powerful rich person, changed him. It made him appreciate what he has earned by making sacrifices and this reason amongst others like being eager to recover the past, prohibited him for understanding the one of the few sincere moments of Daisy, in which she asks him to run away together. He refuses her, his argument being the fact all of his wealth was gathered for her, so that she could enjoy living in that huge palace. So, Daisy is afraid to leave Tom, especially since Tom has got a social position, a dignified past, one that Gatsby could not offer to Daisy. So, one action determines another, and Fitzgerald presents Daisy, as a representative of high-class women, a character who lets herself influenced by the 'values' propagated by the American society of

that time. She does not have the courage to give up her position to follow Gatsby and she chooses to stick with Tom. At the end of the novel, the narrator indirectly calls her ‘careless’ (Fitzgerald 2013, 231), which proves his perspective of characterizing her as a shallow person who does not stand up for the true values, a woman who fits perfectly in the society of the early twentieth century.

An upper class woman like Daisy can only afford the luxury of being honest when in private company. For instance, Daisy admits at the beginning of the novel she is not a good person, telling Nick she is pretty cynical only when the two of them find themselves alone. She tells Nick she is not a very good model for the society: “Well, I’ve had a very bad time, Nick, and I’m pretty cynical about everything.” (Fitzgerald 2013, 22). Her own words mean her moral values are fading and they might be a way for the narrator to announce and at the same time to motivate the future hit-and-run. Daisy’s features are revealed as the story develops itself. The image Fitzgerald constructs of her, which is one suited for most of the female representatives of the high class society, remains stable through the novel. Daisy pretends to be someone else when accompanied by the same class of people and she can only remove her mask when in an intimate company.

Fitzgerald creates a character in Daisy who knows how to make conversation. When something is inconvenient she changes the subject. For instance, while together, when Gatsby wants to tell everything to Tom, Daisy gets up from the table and starts talking about completely something else. She is not sincere to herself and to the others and the narrator notices her sincere moments are shadowed right away by the acting:

I felt the basic insincerity of what she had said. It made me uneasy, as though the whole evening had been a trick of some sort to exact a contributory emotion from me. I waited, and sure enough, in a moment she looked at me with an absolute smirk on

her lovely face as if she had asserted her membership in a rather distinguished secret society to which she and Tom belonged. (Fitzgerald 2013, 23)

Even though she tries really hard to maintain appearances, Daisy does not succeed in hiding from Nick her insincerity. Nick discovers her faking moments based on his sharp sense of observation. He felt like an intruder, who has entered without notice a private society, from which Tom and his wife are a part of. Nick felt uneasy because he knew Daisy's behavior was an act. She, Jordan and other women from the upper class are used to colluding to manipulate men for their wealth and social position:

On the day before her wedding, Daisy is afraid and wants to back out. She sends Tom the string of pearls that signified her engagement to him, an object parallel to the dog collar Tom purchases for his mistress Myrtle, an instrument of domination and control suggestive of slavery's chains. Daisy was forced to follow through with the marriage by women in the service of patriarchy, including Jordan (Froehlich 2011, 217).

Daisy's marriage to Tom is another form of insincerity due to the fact she has a change of heart which is quickly removed by Jordan and other high-class women who are used to obeying the rules imposed by a patriarchal society. The critic suggests the string of pearls represents her submissive condition and it is compared to the dog collar Tom bought for Myrtle. The reference is made to slavery and it is suggestive to the fact that men are the dominators and women the oppressed.

Michael Millgate thinks that by pointing out the bad behavior of women, more particularly of Daisy's, Fitzgerald criticizes the American Dream (Millgate 1962, 336). Even though it was seen by many as a great possibility for succeeding in making a fortune, the author proves it is but merely an illusion, its core being corrupt and without any moral values. The critic affirms that due to the fact Daisy is wanted by Gatsby, Fitzgerald actually exposes what people are aiming towards, idealism and dreams. Daisy is an expensive woman, who

requires a fortune. It is not values that dictate the interaction between individuals, but the possibilities of business affairs.

In conclusion, women's role in society is reduced by men and women were accustomed to limit themselves to house activities, parties and marriage. The rich, as it is pointed out in the novel, do not get married to the poor. Jordan will not get married to Nick, as she has money and he does not. Women try to get out of misery by marrying rich men, who at their turn see women as their possessions. There are not more than one type of woman and more than one type of man. Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan are all after the same thing: money and social position. They just act differently. Also, Tom, as Gatsby represent the same kind of man who considers women are to be won with a great fortune. While in society, women wear a mask, which is not taken off often. In rare occasions, their sincerity is exposed, but those moments are too rare to have any impact. So, with very few differences (Jordan allows herself to behave in a more freely way for instance, than Daisy), Fitzgerald builds the same type of character concerning women's behavior into society. The society formed by them is a cold one, where the moral values are replaced by their own interests and where the masks do not fall even at the last moment.

3. Comparison. Marriage, Wealth and Desire for Lily and Daisy

My thesis argues that Lily Bart from *The House of Mirth* and Daisy Buchanan from *The Great Gatsby* are very similar, being connected through the way they are created by both Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald to carry the message of the woman who wants to be an upper-class member, but has no way of succeeding by herself. There are two different stories but with parallel heroines who pass through different struggles. The characters of Lily and Daisy are the main representatives of high and middle-class society woman (Lily shows a social mobility throughout the novel) that would do anything to conserve her high class privileges. Daisy obtains them by marrying Tom and Lily loses them after her father loses his fortune, but wants to regain them by marrying a rich man. On the other hand, one aspect of the middle class is represented in both novels, as Lily and Myrtle are women who try to reach the upper class. The lower class is also present in the novel. For instance, Nettie is a character who appears at the end of the novel. This technique through which Wharton introduces Nettie only at the end shows a powerful contrast between her behavior and the rich people's behavior.

The critic who notices the need of comparing these two novels is Michael Millgate, in his article "Scott Fitzgerald as Social Novelist: Statement and Technique in *The Great Gatsby*":

It is difficult to understand why Miller does not go on to mention Edith Wharton, whose name nowhere appears in his study. Gilbert Seldes, [...] said when reviewing *The Great Gatsby* for *The Dial* that Fitzgerald had derived the

scenic method 'from Henry James through Edith Wharton'. (Millgate 1962, 338).

So, although Miller has a study in which he establishes all of the influences Fitzgerald has had, he surprisingly does not mention Edith Wharton. Millgate criticizes Miller for not pointing out the influence of Wharton's works had on Fitzgerald's writing. The critic mentions that Gilbert Seldes, in reviewing *The Great Gatsby*, believes that Fitzgerald adapts "the scenic method" through Edith Wharton. This influence means that common elements can be found both in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* and Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Even though Millgate defines the need for acknowledging the presence of Wharton's style in *The Great Gatsby*, he does not focus his discourse on this subject, and neither does he write a wide study to fill the gap that Miller left in his opinion. He brings into discussion one of Fitzgerald's techniques, which is a rather poetic one, used by the author to also create the portrait of women and with it, of society itself. This technique brings a better understanding of women's society, images being relevant for the way characters are seen, so it leads to a closer comparison of the social classes in the two novels:

The method, as has been suggested, is akin to that of poetry and works primarily through the imagery. Alternatively we might say that it is a cinematic technique, achieving economy, speed and tautness by building up the narrative through the scene, rather than the chapter unit, cutting abruptly from one scene to another using the flashback, creating a total pattern through recurrent phrases, scenes, situations, images. (Millgate 1962, 337)

The interpreter focuses on the images created, which have a powerful symbolic meaning in *The Great Gatsby*. Images are powerful tools, which are used by the author to suggest the message faster and at the same time to extend its impact. The outcome is, according to the

critic, the story builds by itself, with the help of the created scenes. The chapter does not have the same influence, as the developing of the action does not depend on it. This technique could be called the “cinematic technique”, due to the richness of the succeeding images. Past scenes intertwine with present ones, for access to the past, the author using the flashback which he introduces abruptly. In my opinion, Wharton does not use this technique as much, as she prefers to delay on most of the scenes, especially on those which present the small talk between the female characters. So, she does not speed through the novel, most of the scenes are following with a slow rhythm and the action is also resting during those moments. Following through, Millgate stops upon the images from *The Great Gatsby*, which run through the chapters, and do not demand for attention; still their significance is not to be missed.

We might examine, for the sake of example, the way in which Daisy’s representativeness is defined by the images which cluster round her. After the famous moment when Gatsby says that Daisy’s voice is ‘full of money’ Nick, as narrator goes on:

[...] that was the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbals’ song of it... (Millgate 1962, 337)

The critic examines Daisy by the images which surround her character. The sound of Daisy’s voice is heard like the sound made by coins when together in a sack. This comparison is conclusive as Daisy is a woman who wants to marry a rich man. Her moral values are replaced with a cynical behavior about everything, as she confesses to Nick during their short walk at the beginning of the novel. Daisy is the most important high class representative in the novel, but not in terms of a gained fortune – there we have the only exception, Jordan Baker. Through Daisy, the reader meets all the women who received the same education and who were influenced by the demands society placed. They refused to fight against them or to

simply oppose them. Daisy wanted to marry Tom because he had money and a social position and although she is not happy, she is not ready to give up all that.

On the other hand, Lily's character is built upon her gestures, her actions, her thoughts, rather than her physical aspect:

[...] her desultory air perplexed him. She stood apart from the crowd, letting it drift by her to the platform or the street, and wearing an air of irresolution which might, as he surmised, be the mask of a very definite purpose. (Wharton 2008, 6)

Lily's looks have a "desultory" and irresolute air, which could match her indecisiveness. The narrator observes an aspect right from the beginning: that Lily has a well-established "purpose" hidden behind her hesitating air. She wants to respect the advice that her mother had given her and to marry a wealthy man but at the same time, while pursuing this goal she gets lost. Selden is amazed by her appearance, which sends a different message about Lily's character, apart from what he knew. As a consequence to being surprised, he assumes her air is just the mask of a "definite purpose". Lily tries to be a good person and she wants to keep her honor unstained. She knows she would have to break a few rules in order to adapt to the high class she wants to be a part of. Even if in the beginning we can observe a Lily who is willing to accept some of the compromises, we can see later that when Gus Trenor tries to manipulate her into having an affair for money, Lily is not able to compromise herself that much. Along the same lines is situated Daisy, which is, in contrast to Lily, able to compromise her happiness in order to reach her aims. So, the methods by which the building of the characters happens are different in the two novels, but the results are not totally different, meaning that there are plenty of resemblances between the two female heroines. As they are the main representatives of the female social class in the two novels, the authors

create them in order to present the fact that hypocrisy and indecisiveness are part of this society.

Both Lily and Daisy are characters created to suggest class critique. Fitzgerald creates Daisy's character to criticize a female social class in which women do not take responsibility for their own acts, just because they can and because their conscience does not stop them. The fact Daisy kills Myrtle is a secret kept by Gatsby, but this is not enough to make Daisy grateful, as she does not even come to her protector's funeral. Rich women are perceived as careless, as Daisy does not care if she hurts Gatsby with her refusal to remain with him, preferring to leave with Tom. Both female characters, Lily and Daisy, pursue money, but they are not both capable of horrible crimes. Lily is not able to hurt anyone, even though she has her bad behaviors. Daisy, instead, is committing a crime – by accident, and not only this, but she also flees the scene, without taking responsibility for what she did. She lets herself influenced by Tom, and she does not dare to think for herself and to act to her own decisions. She does not mind that Gatsby is taking the crime upon himself and has no remorse in letting him receive the punishment she would have deserved. By contrast, Lily has the courage to listen to her conscience, even though she is pushed and influenced by society to sell herself, to sacrifice her happiness and desires for money and social position. By this class mobility and tragic destiny that Lily goes through, Wharton criticizes the sharpness of the higher class, showing how a sensitive character cannot survive in a world ruled by appearances.

Moving forward to the symbolic meaning of the used colors in the building of the scenes, there is a resemblance between Wharton and Fitzgerald, as they both use colors to outline women's character. Starting with Daisy, Millgate himself believes the gold and silver colors keep showing up, being symbols for money and purity. After commenting on a paragraph which presented Nick's sayings according to which Daisy is the golden girl, the critic affirms:

This paragraph is the climax of two strands of imagery which also come together in Daisy's name: the daisy flower is white with a golden centre ('in a white palace... the golden girl'). Daisy herself is always associated with whiteness: in chapter I and again in chapter VII Daisy and Jordan Baker sit together in the couch 'like silver idols weighing down their own white dresses' [...] (Millgate 1962, 337)

The interpreter suggests even the name of Daisy is a symbol for her character. The message that Fitzgerald transmits through the name is that appearances deceive. As the white petals catch the eye, the spectator also uncovers the yellow middle which is the symbol for Daisy's money desire. Millgate points out that the main female character in *The Great Gatsby* is constantly associated with whiteness, which is symbol for purity. But the critic is not specific in saying that "white" is mostly used in describing Daisy's dress, or her house, the "palace", namely exterior things. So, this technique used by Fitzgerald, through which he presents Daisy's purity through her name, proves her exterior appearance, her coverings were white, were pure, while inside she was pure gold, pursuing money without any signs of giving up. The fact she was pure gold on the inside signifies Daisy is a product of a female society which is in need of money. Her nature is created this way, to pursue money.

What the critic observes, is the fact that there is something more behind this white color:

The whiteness, that is to say, goes with the life-denying 'absence of all desire' and links up with Nick's final dismissal of Tom and Daisy as 'careless people' who 'smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness'. (Millgate 1962, 337)

Millgate believes that this "whiteness" is actually an indifference towards all benefic values. Daisy herself admits that she has become "pretty cynical about everything" (Wharton 2008,

22) and besides her sayings, her acts prove this as well. The critic accentuates the fact there is a noticeable “absence of all desire”, so Daisy’s interest is not held by the true moral values, as she kills someone and then escapes. She does not care of the sacrifice that Gatsby made for her either. Her gratitude vanishes in the wind as she, Tom and their daughter leave the East Egg district, while Gatsby gets shot for a crime he did not commit. Fitzgerald presents a women’s society in which a woman commits crime by accident and then runs; it is a corrupt society, in which the guilty ones escape, by the help of money. The author criticizes the female high class, as it is enveloped in lies.

The shallowness of Daisy’s behavior can be seen throughout the novel, mostly in Nick’s observations. He knows people’s character as he studies them. The fact the narrator is also a character is an important technique which allows the author to criticize in a better way the social class, as he can express his views, his observations more easily, as he stops in the middle of a conversation, or a party and tells the reader his remarks. He is involved in all the meaningful scenes and presents his perspective, which can always be one that lacks details, ambiguity being introduced. So, by expressing Daisy’s behavior, the author is actually criticizing through Nick’s help the women’s society in which the high class is unscrupulously. Daisy’s bad character is not the only one hiding beneath the beauty of her clothes. Middle class women hide as well. For instance, Myrtle Wilson, in her desire to climb the hierarchy, tries to do her best in behaving like a high class lady. She fails, as she lacks the manners which come from the “true education”:

With the influence of the dress her personality had also undergone a change.

The intense vitality that had been so remarkable in the garage was converted into impressive hauteur. Her laughter, her gestures, her assertions became more violently affected moment by moment and as she expanded the room

grew smaller around her until she seemed to be revolving on a noisy, creaking pivot through the smoky air. (Fitzgerald 2013, 39)

The author presents Myrtle, who is malleable in terms of behavior; once her dress is changed, her behavior changes also. She is influenced by the dress in a great percentage. She starts giving her gestures an importance which swallows up the room. This metaphor is used so that Nick can express the fact he feels cornered and he also presents to the reader her snobbism. She wants to be a part of the high class, so she tries to act like she already is. By using the word “influence”, Fitzgerald suggests that Myrtle’s actions are going through a process of metamorphosis because of the effect the dress has on her. That piece of cloth is not just any dress, it is a symbol for her possibility of entering the high class. The author uses for characterizing her the words “vitality” and “hauteur”. So, her vigorous appearance was replaced with arrogance. Fitzgerald suggests the fact that her true charm, her natural beauty vanishes the minute she tries to pretend to be something else. The attribute “remarkable” is used to describe her “intense vitality”. So, Myrtle is a vigorous woman, with noticeable qualities, and she loses all of them in the moment she becomes Tom’s mistress in that little society. This married working class woman is aiming high, but she is too naïve to figure out she is caught in a web of lies, because Tom would never leave his wife for her. Also, Millgate did not specify that Myrtle is also a name chosen carefully by the author to match the character’s position and character. Myrtle means, according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, a small tree with shiny green leaves and white flowers that smell nice. It is mostly used as an ornamental plant. It is the case for Myrtle. She is “smaller” than a Daisy, as she is not part of the upper class, but of the middle class. Also, she is seen by Tom as an entertainment, as something ornamental, to be shown to his acquaintances.

Although both Tom and Myrtle are married to someone else, they are having an affair, their marriages being only cover-ups for society. The woman is perceived as something

decorative, because Tom is proud to have such a beautiful mistress and wants to show her to Nick. The reader does not know all the affairs Tom has had, but it is clear that Myrtle was not the only one and the author gives one more example without sinking into it: “Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers too because her arm was broken – she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara hotel” (Fitzgerald 2013, 99). Myrtle is not the first mistress Tom has had, so it is obvious that she is not any different from the others. There are not given many details about the chambermaid whom Tom slept with, but it is enough to figure out that in the novel, the working-class women are seen as ambitious figures which try at any cost to get out of their condition. And it is also a message of the fact that a lower-class woman has no other way of getting out of this than by marrying a wealthy man, who also has great social connections.

It is the same case in *The House of Mirth*, although the method is different, as Wharton does not insist as much on the symbolic meaning of the colors or clothes, but on the little gestures, on the air that is perceived behind these physical features. This does not mean there are no scenes which use the same devices as Fitzgerald. For instance, as Selden and Lily talk in his apartment, Selden prepares the tea. In that moment, his eyes fall on Lily’s hand, which is described to be enveloped by the same whiteness Nick notices on Daisy:

As he watched her hand, polished as a bit of old ivory, with its slender pink nails, and the sapphire bracelet slipping over her wrist, he was struck with the irony of suggesting to her such a life as his cousin Gertrude Farish had chosen. She was so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her, that the links of her bracelet seemed like manacles chaining her to her fate. (Wharton 2013, 9)

The fact that Selden felt “struck with the irony of suggesting” Lily the same life his cousin Gertrude Farish had chosen to live, shows that her skin description makes an impression on him. Also, he sees her as a person belonging to the high class society. Gertrude is a middle-class woman, who is poorly seen. Lily herself thinks poorly of her and insists upon the gossip she has heard and which she tells Selden, that his cousin is not “marriageable” (Wharton 2008, 9). As opposed to Myrtle, Gertrude is not so free in her actions. She cannot afford to be seen with a married man, only for the social position and money that he could provide. The choice of words “polished as a bit of old ivory”, present the same color that Daisy is enwrapped in and it also offers the same impression that she is privileged and at the same time belonging to the high society, as the word “idol” mentioned in Daisy’s description. The difference is that while Selden believes Lily is a being who is chained to the destiny of every woman in this upper-class world, because of her “ivory”, rare and expensive looks, she proves to be in the second part of the novel especially, a moral person, who cannot give into the compromises which are asked of her. On the contrary, Daisy makes a good impression (Millgate associates the whiteness she is surrounded by with pureness), but on the inside, she is a hypocrite. Millgate is right, as Wharton uncovers the difference between the essence and the appearances. Fitzgerald does the same think, the other way around. As Selden thinks ill of Lily – considering she is condemned to repeat the same cycle every woman from the high class is – so are both Nick and Gatsby thinking that Daisy is a good person. In the end, the reality shows each of them they were wrong. The authors criticize women’s class critique, as they use appearances to deceive the society they are a part of themselves as well.

On the other hand the name of the main female character, Lily, in *The House of Mirth* is a true symbol for purity and cleanliness. The lily is also a flower which spreads an intense odor, an intoxicating one that can be hence associated with death. It is interesting as Lily actually dies at the end of the second book. Both Daisy and Lily have a flower’s name, but

they have different meanings. Wharton describes Lily's movements as being delicate as those of a flower: "She made no reply, but her face turned to him with the soft motion of a flower" (Wharton 2008, 135). The scene presents next Lily and Selden, who are alone in the garden. They kiss, he confesses his love, but Lily runs away and he does not follow. She is still not ready for renouncing at the rules women's society imposes, those of getting married to someone with a considerable wealth and social status. She does not know yet happiness is not achieved in this way. Lily's and Daisy's resemblances with the flowers their names represent are proved to be genuine sooner or later. By using those specific flower names, Fitzgerald and Wharton use the same technique, through which they characterize the women with these relevant symbols. They use them to present the class critique, as the names describe the fact Daisy is a female character which is looking only for money and social status, and Lily is the one who succeeds in opposing the system which demanded the exact same thing.

What connects all the women in both novels is the behavior of men towards them. They are treated like some beautiful objects which can provide children and that can be shown in the society, the purpose being to brag about them. Men like Tom, or Gus Trenor think of women as merchandise and Froehlich asks herself:

Did Tom come down to Kentucky to buy horses and find himself a wife? [...]

Such a connection associates the homosocial exchange of women in marriage with horse trading and, through the necklace / collar, the older tradition of slave trading. (Froehlich 2011, 217)

Froehlich's affirmations state the very important fact that Daisy is thought of as a commodity and not an independent woman. Daisy is placed on the same level as a "horse". She is like an animal, not to be treated with respect, not to be loved and taken into consideration, but to be put in a cage of gold and shown to the society. The same happens to Lily and she realizes in the end, after her experiences, that she would have to be at her husband's disposal. The

difference between the two of them is that Daisy adapts to the requests the society makes in order to have money and social status, and Lily refuses to sell herself, being according to Leslie Backer, the one who challenges the social demands: “In contrast to the concept of Lily’s deliberate ‘commodification’ on the marriage market, she chooses to challenge societal expectations” (Backer 2009, 34). This critic presents Lily as an exception, which Daisy is not. The first one appears like a hero who breaks the rules the society imposes. Lily defies the pattern, and fights the system. It is a justified question to ask whether she has succeeded or not as she dies at the end of the novel. Has she beaten the system or has the system defeated her? There is a serious debate around these questions as death can be seen as both a victory and a lost battle. One interpretation would be that with death freedom comes as well, as Lily is no longer the prisoner of a perverted society.

Lily is an exception and her character is different than Daisy’s as she has the experience of all three social classes. From her life journey, it can be said that women from higher social classes treat poorly the ones beneath them. Bertha is part of the upper class and she does not care about her friendship with Lily, she casts her out, and in that moment, Lily was a part of the middle class. Also, Lily thinks ill of Selden’s cousin, whom she finds lower than her social condition. The same happens in *The Great Gatsby* as Daisy murders Myrtle and then runs away without carrying she was a human being. It appears both Fitzgerald and Wharton understand the reality of the social hierarchy. The upper-class women think of themselves as being superior, and offer themselves the right to humiliate the ones below their social class. The authors criticize this type of behavior, as humanity is lost to money which is perceived as power, the power to undermine other beings.

An important resemblance between these two female characters is that they both have other women models they can look up to. Lily has Nettie Struther and Daisy has Jordan, although these two models are parts of different social classes. This proves that the women

social classes, either the high class women or the working class, are not formed entirely of bad women. The authors show the fact that freedom from the domination of a society which imposes its rules can be gained. Daisy could have chosen a different lifestyle but she has not. This example of other women who can resist the society's demands show that no matter how much pressure there is, one can be strong and can resist it. Jordan lives freely, enjoys life, and is not married from convenience. Also, talking about Nettie, Eileen Connell says:

Her function in the novel is to represent and to materialize a working-class version of Lily's day dreams of worldly and domestic happiness. A wife, mother, and wage earner, she is a displaced part of the ornamental Lily's identity and provides the means by which the novel imagines what Lily might have been had she practiced other types of female labor. (Connell 1997, 574)

Connell thinks that Nettie is another version of Lily, if the latter would have given up her dreams of social status and money. The critic believes the main character in *The House of Mirth* would have had a chance to be happy with a domestic life. By using the choice of words "Her function in the novel", the critic presents Nettie's role to that of serving Lily with images of her "what could have been" life. Her life is very different because of the path she chooses. Lily herself admits she was not made for this type of life:

No; she was not made for mean and shabby surroundings, for the squalid compromises of poverty. Her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in. (Wharton 2008, 27)

Lily is aware her capability of being able to live Nettie's life is unrealistic as she felt she was not born for being poor. She is not willing to carry out the compromises poverty demands but at the same time she cannot accept a tainted dignity in order to enter the rich people's world.

In conclusion, women in both novels are seen as animals, or objects, which can be displayed as ornaments, as things which can delight the eye of the watcher. They cannot survive on their own, they need a 'master', who is the man who proposes. They are though desperate to marry, and all their lives they are preparing for that step. Lily and Daisy have different behaviors but they are the same at some point, when every one of them wants to be integrated into the society, wants to get married and considers this is the only way for them to be accepted. So, the women's class critique in *The Great Gatsby* is presented as being ruled by hypocrisy, but the female characters' behavior is also due to the fact men treat them as disposables. Marriage is a mandatory function in the novel, and the future husband has to be to a wealthy man who also has a social status. Wharton criticizes the criteria according to which women choose their husbands through Lily, whom she punishes with the sufferance of not being able to find a husband, but also through Bertha and Misses Trenor, as the first is not happy and as a consequence cheats on her husband, and the latter is almost being cheated by Gus (and if Lily had not refused, this would have happened). In conclusion, in *The House of Mirth* the characters are immoral, but so are they in *The Great Gatsby*. Women in Fitzgerald's novel form a society also criticized by the author. The system also imposes marriage with a rich man, and women obey the rules. They are a society of servants, of commodities, Jordan and Lily being the only ones who break these rules.

CONCLUSIONS

As many studies on each novel reflect several similarities which can be explored, I decided my thesis should prove the fact that these two novels, *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby*, have many aspects in common. My research is focused on the way Edith Wharton and F. Scott Fitzgerald are criticizing the social classes, both authors using the technique in which scenes and characters are built depending on their relationship with money. Besides analyzing the money topic, I also chose to explore the female characters and how they have been used by Wharton and Fitzgerald to highlight the class critique.

Along the same lines, Michael Millgate observes the commonality between *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* concerning characters' relationship with money and mentions this, but it remains no more than a short observation which is exemplified with other two novels of the authors: "Both Fitzgerald and Wharton, that is to say, clearly perceive the existence of an American class-system dominated by the money-power" (Millgate 1962, 339). So, the authors are interested, as Millgate points out, in reflecting a reality in which money shapes society and defines the class structure. American society is dominated by the power money institutes. Most of the characters either in *The House of Mirth* or in *The Great Gatsby* are influenced in their decisions by money. The visions presented in these works involve a society drawn and defined by money. If they have money, characters can be accepted by the higher classes, if not, they are isolated from them. These similarities between the two novels are noticed by Millgate, who considers that Fitzgerald is from all of his predecessors, closest to Wharton:

The point is rather that Fitzgerald, as a social novelist, is much closer to Edith Wharton than to any of his predecessors or contemporaries: he works in the same

social area, uses similar characters, and views society from much the same standpoint.

(Millgate 1962, 339)

The two novelists admit society is tainted and they both illustrate it in their novels; socially, Millgate believes they are more alike than many critics notice. They use similar characters and have similar points of view about society. Fitzgerald could have been influenced by Wharton, and his work is a good proof to determine this affirmation.

The main female characters in the novels are Lily Bart and Daisy Buchanan, both having the desire to marry a rich man in order to enjoy the advantages of money and high social class. Lily does not succeed, but Daisy does marry Tom, who although lacks moral values, has a social status and a huge fortune, these being the sufficient attributes which lead Daisy to marry him. Even if at first Lily is interested in following the rules society imposes on a woman, that she must get married, in the end she appeals to her conscience and does not give in into the materialism which is spreading. In the end she is beaten by it, as is Gatsby. The novels do not have happy endings, as the characters which defy society through their actions, end up dying, as Singley writes:

Lily dies not only because she fails to escape her fate or vanquish her competition but because she rejects – sometimes inadvertently, sometimes deliberately – the shallow, materialistic values of her society. *The House of Mirth* thus combines a purely deterministic outlook with a more idealistic one. (Singley 1995, 69)

The critic considers the author of *The House of Mirth* is interested in pointing out also the power of destiny, which determines the main character to act, but I think destiny represents a refuge for her to justify her actions. A proof of this statement stands right in the novel:

The fact that her immediate anxieties were relieved did not blind her to a possibility of their recurrence; it merely gave her enough buoyancy to rise once more above her

doubts and feel a renewed faith in her beauty, her power, and her general fitness to attract a brilliant destiny. (Wharton 2008, 86-7)

Wharton presents thus a destiny that is to be controlled, so it does not possess a power of its own. It cannot act by itself. Life can only be better through the means of beauty and power – this is Lily Bart's life. The text is presenting a destiny that is only blamed when in bad situations, as an excuse for human failures. These failures are not actually failures; they are perceived this way only because society sees them like that. It is a disaster if you are not married and if you do not have money and a social status.

Another feature of Lily that Singley discusses is her ability to reject the materialistic values of her society. The character is attracted indeed of the perspective of having a life of wealth, but in the end she understands she has to sacrifice her dignity, so she refuses to do that. She prefers to be poor and honest, even if she cannot keep a job for a longer period of time, as she is not used to.

On the other hand, Lily is an exception, as Daisy and the other female characters from both *The House of Mirth* and *The Great Gatsby* are paying any price in order to be wealthy. Daisy, for instance, commits murder and she hides from the responsibility which comes with it. She runs away not with the man who saved her from going to jail, but with her husband, who enables George to kill Gatsby.

The upshot of all this is that women in the novels are the ones that highlight materialism, money being the main end of their quest in life. Myrtle, Bertha or Daisy are all willing to achieve or to keep their fortune at any cost. But they do not mind breaking the moral values in order to achieve their goal. Lily is the only one who can be considered an exception. Both Wharton and Fitzgerald are criticizing society by displaying the way characters act and by delineating their personality, but they are not punishing them – as in the end the characters die, being sacrificed because of the rules of a cruel society – so the authors

rather present the society, without specifically saying it acts in an immoral way, letting itself through its own actions to criticize itself.

Works cited

- Backer, Leslie, *Lily Bart as Artist in Wharton's "THE HOUSE OF MIRTH"*, Northern Arizona University, *The Explicator*, Vol. 68, No. 1, (2010).
- Barry, Peter. *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester University Press, 2002.
- Berman, Ronald, *The Great Gatsby and the twenties*, The Cambridge Companion to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Edited by Ruth Prigozy, Cambridge University Press, (2001): 79-94.
- Connell, Eileen, *Edith Wharton joins the working classes: The house of mirth and the New York City working girls' class*, Vol. 26, *Women's Studies: An interdisciplinary journal*, Amsterdam, (1997): 557-604.
- Croteau, David, Hoynes, William *Media/Society: Industries, Images, and Audiences: Industries, Images, and Audiences*, SAGE Publications, 2013, New York
- Dimock, Wai-Chee, *Debasing Exchange: Edith Wharton's "The House of Mirth"*, PMLA, Modern Language Association, Vol. 100, No. 5 (Oct., 1985): 783-92.
- Donaldson, Scott, *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"*, G. K. Hall & Co., 1984, Boston, Massachusetts
- Donaldson, S., *Possessions in The Great Gatsby*, *The Southern Review*; Spring 2001; 37, 2; ProQuest Central.
- Fetterley, Judith, "The Temptation To Be A Beautiful Object': Double Standard and Double Bind in *The House of Mirth*," *Studies in American Fiction* 5 (1977): 200, in Restuccia, Frances L., *The Name of the Lily: Edith Wharton's Feminism(s)*, University of Wisconsin Press, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1987): 223-38, *Contemporary Literature*.

- Fraser, John, *Dust and Dreams and The Great Gatsby*, The Johns Hopkins University press, *ELH*, Vol. 32, No. 4, (Dec., 1965): 554-64.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2872258>;
- Froehlich, M. G., *Gatsby's Mentors: Queer Relations Between Love and Money in The Great Gatsby*, in *The Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Fall 2011, 209-226;
- Gargano, James W., *The House of Mirth: Social Futility and Faith, American Literature*, Duke University Press, Vol. 44, No. 1, (Mar., 1972): 137-43.
- Howard, Maureen, *The Bachelor and the Baby: The House of Mirth*, The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton, Cambridge University Press, New York, (1995): 137-56.
- Kassanoff, Jenny A., *Extinction, Taxidermy, Tableaux Vivants: Staging Race and Class in "The House of Mirth"*, *PMLA*, Vol. 115, No. 1, Special Topic: Rereading Class (Jan., 2000), pp. 60-74, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/463231>
- Kim, Sharon, *Lamarckism and the Construction of Transcendence in "The House of Mirth"*, *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (summer 2006), pp. 187-210,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/29533752>
- Lockridge, Ernest, *Introduction* in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Great Gatsby: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Edited by Ernest Lockridge, Prentice-Hall, Inc., (March 1984): 1-18.
- Matterson, Stephen, *The Great Gatsby*, MacMillan Education Ltd, Basingstoke, 1990
- Millgate, Michael, *Scott Fitzgerald as Social Novelist: Statement and Technique in "The Great Gatsby"*, *The Modern Language Review, Modern Humanities Association*, Vol. 57, No. 3, (Jul., 1962): 335-39.
- McDowell, Margaret B., *Viewing the Custom of Her Country: Edith Wharton's Feminism*, University of Wisconsin Press, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Autumn, 1974): 521-38,

Contemporary Literature,

http://www.jstor.org/stable/1207776?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents;

- Moyer, Kermit W., “The Great Gatsby: Fitzgerald’s Meditation on American History” 1972, 215-28 in Donaldson, Scott, *Critical Essays on F. Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby”*, G. K. Hall & Co., 1984, Boston, Massachusetts
- Samuels, Charles Thomas, *The Greatness of “Gatsby”*, *The Massachusetts Review*, Massachusetts Review, Inc., Vol. 7, No. 4, (Autumn, 1966): 783-794
- Singley, Carol J., *Edith Wharton - Matters of mind and spirit*, Cambridge University Press, USA, (1995).