

Introduction

The author F. Scott Fitzgerald was born in 1896 in St. Paul, Minnesota; he studied at Princeton University, and in 1917 joined the army. In 1920 he married Zelda Sayre of Alabama. Together with other famous writers of the twenties such as Ernest Hemingway he settled in Paris for some time: they are referred to as the "lost generation". From 1937 on Fitzgerald lived and worked in Hollywood; he died there (with one book unfinished "The Last Tycoon") in 1940. His books deal with the idealism and the disillusionment of the post- World War I decade (cf. Brockhaus 1988, vol.7 p.346 F. Scott Fitzgerald) as well as with the struggle of society to find spiritual happiness besides the material wealth (cf. DiBacco p.525). Fitzgerald is often described as "central to the American twenties" (Long p.177), as chronicler (cf. Thies p.585) or historian (cf. Long p.177) of the golden years, "He named the Jazz age" (Long p.177).

His greatest and most famous novel "The Great Gatsby" was published in 1925 and is a perfect example of his talent to describe social circumstances. We can find a lot about "Class in the USA in the 1920s" in his novel.

In order to show evidence for my hypothesis that

Fitzgerald realistically describes typical representatives of the existing social classes in the post war decade.

I have to concentrate on a few specific examples. Considering all the social classes as well as the representatives that are mentioned in the novel would go beyond the scope of this research paper.

I therefore choose Wilson as an example of the impoverished people of those days, because in the course of my research I found this class to be widely ignored by numerous sources. Myrtle as well as her friends and relatives will be neglected in this context. Due to their notion of being superior to Wilson (cf. Fitzgerald p.32 l.4-22), they do not appear stereotypical of their own class.

Nick Carraway, the narrator, is disregarded as well: although he is a main character in the text his function in respect to the novel is to be a neutral

observer of the ongoing events. We should keep in mind that it is obviously not Fitzgerald's intention to criticise the behaviour of middle class people.

I select Tom and Daisy Buchanan to represent the established rich, the leisure class, since they provide a contrast to the still poor Wilson and the ex-poor Gatsby.

The latter I describe to show the class that, in most historical reviews, is regarded as the most typical of the twenties and, of course, because he is the hero of the story.

1. Social Classes in the Nineteen-Twenties

The twenties are often referred to as "The Roaring Twenties" or "The Gilded Age", because of the prosperity that flourished everywhere. But actually, various social classes (co-)existed during this decade. Three of them will be described more closely.

1.1 The Established Rich

People that were born wealthy (e.g. by inheritance of large family estates and savings) will be referred to as the "established rich". Their fortune originated primarily from the time prior to World War I. Scarcely anybody made a fortune during the Great War (only a handful of profiteers and producers of weapons and explosives such as the DuPont family of Wilmington Delaware [Brockhaus 1988, vol.7 p.39: DuPont]). Business was widely under government control to prevent any irregularities inside the United States. Profit was reduced to a secondary objective, as the survival of the nation became the primary goal. In the years before the war, huge trusts with monopolistic ambitions had dominated commerce. The founders of those trusts had often earned several million dollars during their lives. The most famous of them had been John D.

Rockefeller, who had become the richest person in the world as chairman of the Standard Oil Trust (S.O., with the trademark Esso[®] worldwide, today in the US Exxon[®]). The extended family clans of those people and their business allies to a high degree made up the mentioned class.

1.2 The Poor

Often disregarded is the situation, even the mere existence of the poor in the "Golden Decade".

Prior to the economic boom, there was the post war depression of 1918. The high demand for lifestyle goods could not be met by the industry, needing time to adjust their facilities. Tanks and machine guns were no longer in demand; cars and electric appliances were in want. In consequence, inflation rates went up (cf. DiBacco p.511). The slump was under control in 1919 and business began to pick up momentum, but the high cost of living remained (cf. Sellers p.331). Industrial workers, who had worked hard to supply the military with weapons and thus supported the American soldiers, now started to go on strike to obtain higher wages. Employers fired many of them, especially those who had joined labour unions (cf. DiBacco p.511). Those fired were often not given a second chance, they found themselves in a cruel situation: either they had to set up their own business - always a risky adventure - or they had to work for even lower wages. At the end of 1920 another short recession followed.

During such inconstant economical circumstances, many people lost their money and went bankrupt. Even in the glorious twenties, only a minority was privileged to live the American Dream and ascend from poverty to wealth (cf. the dishwasher to millionaire stereotype in Hollywood movies, e.g. the early Chaplin films). Hence the unfortunate silent majority lived in suburbs of the big cities, merely trying to survive while others accumulated enormous fortunes by mergers.

Furthermore when real wages for workers rose, this was "not in proportion to the increase of productivity and profit" (Sellers p.338). Consequently, individual

purchase power even decreased although wages were raised: hence most factory workers remained in a position of poverty (cf. Sellers p.338). They earned less than half as much as would have been necessary to provide for "universal well-being" (Sellers p.338). The maldistribution of income in the United States was worse than ever before "the top 0.1 percent of American families in 1929 had an aggregate income equal to that of the bottom 42 percent."(McElvaine p.38)

Hence even though there is not much fiction or non-fiction literature (with the possible exception of Upton Sinclair and Sinclair Lewis [cf. Daiches p.97ff]) about these impoverished people of the twenties, there was a significant number of them. As Burl Noggle put it when writing about the role of the women in the twenties:

"And for every Fitzgerald Flapper of the twenties there were countless fatigued and undernourished textile mill operators and migratory fruit pickers and mining town and ghetto housewives who never knew the life of Zelda Fitzgerald." (Noggle p.165)

1.3 The New Rich

The people that added the "Roaring" to the twenties were the new rich that had climbed up the social ladder and now lived in ostentation (the English call them "snobs").

1.3.1 Legal Sources of Income

The two important presidents who influenced the decade were Warren G. Harding and Calvin Coolidge. Both of them were Republicans and they basically

believed in "laissez faire" (Rand p.vii & 141; DiBacco p.514) that is French for "let (us) do" and means that government keeps its hands out of the economical developments. Harding's philosophy was to exclusively support business, but never intervene in it otherwise. He raised tariffs and lowered taxation of industry (cf. DiBacco p.515). In consequence profit and productivity rose sharply from 1923 on (cf. Sellers p.337f). When Harding died in 1923 Calvin Coolidge (who later won the 1924 election in a landslide) replaced him.

Coolidge once said "The business of America is business" and accordingly, he left the economy to itself (called Open Market by critical economists such as J. M. Keynes [cf. Brockhaus 1990, vol. 11 pp.654-656] and J. K. Galbraith [cf. Galbraith 1952; Brockhaus 1989, vol.8 p.90]). Productivity rose further and the (ohne Artikel) wealth started to spread. The income was particularly spent on cars and new modern electric appliances like washing machines and electric stoves (cf. De Long p.8). Distributors of those appliances made fortunes, for example General Electric.

The effect on the stock market was positive indeed, and numerous investors often made tremendous gains within few months.

In contrast to the established upper class the new rich did not inherit their wealth but acquired it by themselves. This myth "from rags to riches" (Thies p.586), the "American Dream" (Commager pp.vii-xvii), was revived during this decade.

1.3.2 Illegal Sources of Income

The 18th Amendment (Prohibition), ratified January 1919 under President Wilson, and the Volstead Act of October 1919 -providing for the enforcement of the amendment- prohibiting the manufacture, sale, transportation, or possession of intoxicating beverages also had a severe impact on society (cf. DiBacco p.530).

The law was supported by representatives from rural areas, the Methodist church and especially the Anti-Saloon League (cf. DiBacco p.531; Sellers

p.331). The latter proclaimed "Now for an era of clean living and clear thinking!" when the Volstead Act had been passed (cf. DiBacco p.530).

Their hope was soon "liquefied" by millions of people who would not give up their drinking habits: the urban high society of the twenties had frequent parties where they drank alcohol, listened to jazz music and danced the Charleston whereas the importance (and influence) of religion declined.

Women, known as Flappers, appeared in countless numbers (cf. DiBacco p. 528), independently having parties like before only men did (*so plötzlich sind die Frauen ja auch nicht erschienen: umformulieren, z.B. –A typical woman of that class was called "flapper"; she wore short skirts and even trousers and spent her time having parties.*) thus, in the opinion of the conservative rural areas, undermining American morality.

The law could not be enforced since the capacity of the prisons was insufficient for some extra forty to fifty thousand people who broke this law every year (DiBacco p.531). "As a result, violators were often let off with little or no punishment" (DiBacco p.531).

The many people that loved to drink alcohol naturally created a huge demand that was met to a high degree by large illegal organisations known as gangs that sold the liquor in so-called "speakeasies" - illegal bars that sprang up everywhere- but also by home-made liquor brewed by ordinary people.

The big organisations like the world famous Chicago gang, with Al Capone as boss smuggled alcohol across the borders of Mexico and Canada (cf. DiBacco p530f). This business became known as "bootlegging" and it was very profitable. Thousands made enormous amounts of money, for example the "Chicago gang took in several million dollars a month during its heyday" (DiBacco p.531).

Most notoriously, the Italian, Irish and Polish immigrants (and their second generations, already born in the United States) dominated this illegal business with their huge (catholic) family clans. Used to drinking some alcoholic beverages with meals at home (mostly wine and beer) as part of their culture, they sold the more profitable stronger spirits (whiskey, gin, rum and similar distilled products) to their mostly White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP, a sociological stereotype) clients (cf. Brockhaus 1992, vol.17, p.526: Prohibition).

A prominent illustration of the American Dream of an Irish catholic family are the Kennedys: Joseph P. Kennedy (1888-1969) "banker, ship owner, speculator (indeed an alcohol smuggler in his beginnings) and politician" and his famous sons John Fitzgerald (1917-1963), Robert Francis (1925-1968) and Edward Moore (*1932) (Brockhaus 1990, vol.11 p.596: Kennedy; Davis)

All these "rich people" had one thing in common: they were preoccupied with making "their" money and "their" profit. This egoistic and materialistic attitude was probably the most widespread in the whole decade (it would later be punished by the Great Depression) and it did not help the poor out of their misery (cf. McElvaine p.42)(Roosevelt's "Great Deal" was a later act of solidarity, missing in the twenties).

2. Social Classes as Described in the Novel "The Great Gatsby"

2.1 The Established Rich

Tom and Daisy Buchanan represent the established rich.

Daisy Fay is from a very rich family in Louisville, Kentucky. To her house belonged "the largest of the banners and the largest of the lawns" (Fitzgerald p.59) and at the age of eighteen she already had her own car, not a cheap Ford Model-T (the best selling car of the days) but a roadster.

Tom's family is even richer: his wealth appears to Nick as a representative of the middle class is unimaginable, (umstellen: To Nick as a representative of the middle class Tom's wealth appears to be downright unimaginable.)

"His Family was enormously wealthy- even in college his freedom with money was a matter for reproach- but now he'd left Chicago and come East in a fashion that took your breath away; for instance, he'd brought down a string of polo ponies from Lake Forrest. It was hard to realise that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that." (Fitzgerald p.10 l.19ff).

In the course of Jordan Baker's description of the Buchanans' life it becomes clear that neither of them has ever had an occupation. After their marriage they "started off on a three months' trip to the South Seas" (Fitzgerald p.61 l.1f). A little later they moved "for no particular reason" (Fitzgerald p.10 l.20) to France for one year. With a full-time employment this would not have been possible. Nick also gives a very fitting description of their lifestyle after their return to the United States,

"..., and then drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together" (Fitzgerald p.10 l.21f)

These aspects make them to (ohne to)stereotypical members of the "leisure" class.

(hier oder in der conclusion würde ich noch kurz erwähnen, mit welcher impliziten Wertung Fitzgerald diese Klasse darstellt; z.B. From the way how Tom and Daisy are presented in the novel the reader gets the impression that Fitzgerald implicitly criticizes this class for its carelessness and its irresponsible use of wealth. – evtl. hier Nicks Einschätzung vom Ende zitieren: They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness)

2.2 The Poor

Fitzgerald describes the situation of the impoverished by the character of George Wilson, the owner of a garage in the "Valley of Ashes". The "Valley of Ashes" symbolises the hopeless situation of its few inhabitants (cf. Frausing p.34). There is no other colour in their surroundings but the melancholic grey which already influenced Wilson whom Nick describes as "spiritless" and "anaemic" (Fitzgerald p.23 l.32).

That Wilson is poor is obvious, his garage is in awful shape and he has no business at all. The only car in the garage is - as well as everything else in the

valley - already covered with dust (cf. Fitzgerald p.23); this car is of no more use to him.

Wilson is desperate to buy the car Tom intended to sell in order to finally earn some money (which he needs to move West because he suspects Myrtle of having a relationship) (*eher: of having an affair with another man*) but Tom uses the car only as a pretext to see Myrtle.

Wilson had set up his garage when the valley was not yet deserted -the remaining paint on the huge advertising screen of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg indicates that those great days had been a reality. His idea to make money by repairing and selling cars was actually promising in those days because there had never been such a huge demand for automobiles before and due to Henry Ford's assembly line the required supply of cars was also provided for: From 1921 to 1923 sales rose from 1.5 million to 3.5 million cars per year (cf. DiBacco p.518).

These figures may lead to the conclusion that the number of accidents rose likewise (which certainly must have been the case) and thus garage owners had their hands full, but for the ill-fated Wilson rules do not apply. This makes Wilson to (*to weglassen*) a typical loser *nur mit einem o: loser* of the decade: during all these years of rising economy many people had to give up their dream of wealth inspired by those "Great Gatsbies".

2.3 The New Rich

James Gatz alias Jay Gatsby is an example of those new rich in the United States of the twenties that acquired their wealth by illegal means.

When James Gatz was young he already wanted to escape from the farming life and his parents. To achieve this he wrote a schedule (Fitzgerald p.123) in order to develop a successful but rigid structure that would - through hard work and an ascetic way of life - lead him out of his misery. He changed this morally right path when he returned from war.

Daisy, ergänzen: the woman he had fallen in love with, (who) stands for all the beauty and the glamour of the world, but she married another man while he fought the Germans in Europe. Gatsby imagines that he could win her back if he could attain her social status .In order to achieve this a quick source of money is required.

Um den langen Einschub im nächsten Satz zu vermeiden, umformen: This source was provided by Meyer Wolfsheim, an influential gangster boss who fixed ... (bis:) betting shops. Meyer Wolfsheim "made him", that means he got Gatsby involved in the illegal business.

Meyer Wolfsheim, an influential gangster boss (he "fixed the World's Series back in 1919" [Fitzgerald p.58 l.23] which was a huge scandal: players of the favourite team were accused of having intentionally played bad in order to gain profit out of their own insider status at the betting shops) "made him" (Fitzgerald p.122) that means he got him involved in the illegal business.

Tom reveals that Gatsby and Wolfsheim had sold alcohol in their drug stores and manipulated betting games (cf. Fitzgerald p.97 l.36ff; p.98 l.1ff). Not only Tom's investigation and the bar stocked "with gins and liquors" (Fitzgerald p.35 l.21) indicate Gatsby's involvement in illegal affairs but also his harsh reply when Nick asks him what business he was in,

"That's my affair" (Fitzgerald p.69 l.27). (nicht separat einrücken)

His bootlegging activities and his materialistic attitude (that is underlined by his belief "that money will buy back the girl" [Hoffman p.133 last line]) identify him as typical of the 1920s. The extravagant parties, his admirable car as well as his enormous house that resembles a French château add to that impression.

However not representative of the decade is his sober attitude towards alcohol (he rarely drinks because he saw how the liquor "liquefied" Dan Cody's self-control [cf. Fitzgerald p.76 l.17; l.27) but that is an exception.

Therefore his lifestyle is prototypical of the enduring image of the Roaring Twenties until today. He has realised the American dream for himself; he has

become the hero of a "from rags-to-riches-story" (cf. Thies p.586) but in a way that puts aside all moral limitations.

evtl hier ergänzen, dass abgesehen davon, dass er ein typischer Vertreter seiner Klasse ist, seine romantische Motivation, Daisy zurückzugewinnen, sein ganz individueller Grund ist

(auch hier würde ich noch einen Satz zur Wertung ergänzen, z.B. For the reader it is difficult to say whether Fitzgerald admires or criticizes Gatsby. On the one hand you can feel the fascination with the glamour of Gatsby's world, but on the other hand you realize that his wealth is based on fraud and petty crime.

Conclusion

In order to test my hypothesis I intended to produce evidence (Ändern: to highlight) three main topics.

First (Komma) the existence of the established rich in the decade and the Buchanans' affiliation to this class.

Second (Komma) the existence of the poor in the twenties and Wilson's affiliation to this class.

Third (Komma) the existence of a new rich category (besser: of a class of newly rich people) clearly different from the established rich with Gatsby as a prototype to (statt to : of) this class.

I found evidence and analogies for the existence of all three groups in fact and fiction by using information and quotes from traditional history books, encyclopaedias and recent webpages.

Furthermore I was able to confirm the affiliation of the characters to the described three classes.

Tom and Daisy Buchanan inherited all their wealth, they never had to earn a dime by themselves, hence they personify the established high society.

Wilson is very unfortunate and fails to fulfil his individual American Dream: he thus belongs to the poor citizens.

Gatsby intended to work hard for his wealth but then acquired it rapidly by all illegal means consequently he belongs to the new rich of the age.

All my conclusions are supported by quotes and historical facts. My initial hypothesis is verified.

hier würde ich als Abschluss so in etwa formulieren:

Of course a novel like "The Great Gatsby" is not a social study made up in order to present sociological facts; it definitely has layers of meaning beyond the social aspect. But as the novel is set in the 1920s it reflects the social reality of its time in a certain way and therefore it can be regarded as a social document where class definitely plays a strong role.

In my opinion social class plays a definitely strong role - both in fact and fiction - during the Roaring Twenties. (*den Satz dann weglassen*)

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