Identity and Wealth in The Great Gatsby and The Talented Mr. Ripley

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Abstract

Considered to be one of the great American novels, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* tackles and dismantles the myth of the American Dream through its titular character Jay Gatsby, who reinvents himself in order to chase after his ambitions of achieving affluence and social status. Once having achieved that wealth, Gatsby succumbs to its influence without the benefits of its status due to him belonging in the class of so-called "new money." This is mirrored in Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as the young and money-hungry Tom Ripley manages to achieve both wealth and the "old money" status through more sinister means at the cost of his own identity. This thesis will further explore the relationship between wealth and how it forms a character's identity as well as how the aspiration for wealth can be achieved in a post-World War I and post-World War II United States in order to showcase the disparity that had developed between classes in that time period. Furthermore, along with class identity, this thesis will also examine the way wealth transforms a character's own identity and how it can shape gender identities within the novels. This will include how masculinity is defined within the male protagonists of *The Great Gatsby* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* as well as how femininity is interwoven with class in the female characters of *The Great Gatsby.* Moreover, this paper will also take a look into Nick Carraway as middle-man character; between old and new money ideal as well as between the masculine and feminine. Considering that both novels feature obsession as a main characteristic of want, this paper will delve further into the relationship money has with ambition and the obsessions of the two titular characters; Jay Gatsby's desire for Daisy and her status, and Tom Ripley's obsession with Dickie Greenleaf and his familial wealth. Moreover, this thesis will also survey the way wealth and its status are related to crime and the way differing classes face consequences.

Keywords: American Dream, wealth, Jay Gatsby, crime, Tom Ripley, identity

Contents

Introduction

Set in the middle of the Roaring Twenties and the height of the Jazz Age, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald bursts into the literary scene, quickly becoming one of the staple novels that criticises the myth of the American Dream. Dealing with the division of the so-called "old money" and "new money," the novel tackles the notion that it is not just money that makes ones wealthy, but also the status that can only be preordained by birth. Born in Midwest United States, James Gatz dreamed of success and wealth, and to achieve that dream he changed his name into Jay Gatsby, whose later desire becomes the attention of Daisy Buchanan, a Southern girl who married into generational wealth. Furthermore, Jay Gatsby is propped up by the novel's narrator Nick Carraway as the quintessential pursuer of the American Dream, whose subsequent death symbolises the death of the American Dream itself. On the other hand, thirty years after the publishing of *The Great Gatsby*, Patricia Highsmith publishes *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1955), a novel focusing on a young man pursuing wealth, although this time through much more sinister means. Sent to Italy to bring back Dickie Greenleaf back to the United States to take over the family ship building business, Tom Ripley kills Dickie and assumes his identity and the Tom from America loses his shape, becoming more an imitation rather than identity. Taking on Dickie's persona allows Tom to indulge in all of the luxuries he could not afford with his working-class background, and once he is forced to shed Dickie's skin, his will allows Tom to comfortably remain in the upper-class, but his identity still remains lost.

This thesis will take a closer look at the ways wealth is presented in both of the aforementioned novels as well as how that wealth shapes the identities of their characters. The first section will present the American landscape of both eras, most namely the post-World War I Jazz Age and post-World War II Eisenhower era. The second part will go more in depth into analysing the respective genres of the novels as well as the presentation of both novels' protagonists and the hero personas they are made up of. The third section will dive into the American Dream mythos and go over the east/west and old money/new money divides within *The Great Gatsby* as well as how James Gatz transformed into Jay Gatsby. It will also overview the class difference in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* between Tom and Dickie, how their American background influences the image of Europe, and Tom Ripley's metamorphosis into Dickie Greenleaf. The fourth section will explore the aspects of desire and obsession, which in Gatsby's case is Daisy and her status while and Ripley's it is obsession with Dickie and wealth, as well as his lack of physical desire. The penultimate part will take a closer look into the

connection between gender and wealth and the way it manifests through the different characters in *The Great Gatsby*, as well as how Tom Ripley's coded bisexuality influences his masculine presentation throughout different identities. Lastly, the final section will analyse the difference in treatment of new money and old money in the wake of a criminal act in *The Great Gatsby* versus how the eponymous Tom Ripley is able to get away with murder and achieve his own American Dream.

1. Post-World War America

1.1. *The Great Gatsby* and the Jazz Age

Having been published in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* follows a, at the time, contemporary time-frame, which encompasses both its characters and their surroundings. The mood and feeling in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* are shaped by one of its most prominent characteristics, the Jazz Age backdrop that follows the entirety of the novel.

The 1920s followed the end of a decade plagued with conflict and destruction that came with World War One, and in its aftermath the United States managed to find its footing as one of the most powerful countries (Pringle 43). This was further solidified with president Woodrow Wilson's philosophy that the American people can help restore order internationally and thus birthing the early unique ideals of American big money and optimism along with internationalism, which would be further developed and executed after World War II (Pringle 43). And despite a downturn occurring immediately after World War One, business started to boom (Moore 116), leading to a sort of deification of the chase for success, wherein individuals were encouraged to make as much money as possible by both the government and their surroundings (Moore 117). Furthermore, as the economy seemed to grow and more people acquired more money, the younger generation started to indulge in luxuries and new art forms, all the while creating new social norms around money (Pringle 45), inadvertently creating a new divide between social classes.

This development would lead to the development of the so-called American Dream, which Pringle defines by quoting the term's originator, James Truslow Adams, who stated that the American Dream represented a dream "of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognised by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of their birth" (46). In its ideal form, the American Dream would allow social mobility to all classes, a notion which the novel *The Great Gatsby* greatly opposes.

Although Jay Gatsby seems to have found his escape from his working-class background to an upper-class environment, showing the success of the American Dream, he is still seen as an outsider by his "old money" peers and ultimately meets his demise due to this division. The novel criticises the idealistic view of the American Dream, and Pringle calls upon John Dewey's similar criticisms, which focused on the poor working conditions of the working class and the lack of prospects outside of manual labour (48).

Despite these criticisms, the economy boomed as financial investors gained popularity thanks to different new opportunities and ways of financial planning (Pringle 48). Furthermore, other sectors also started prospering, such as the automotive industry as roads and highways developed, allowing rural areas to connect with other parts of the country, made possible by the affordability and demand of Ford's Model T (Moore 122-126).

This showcases a conflicting way of thought that was present during the decade; as consumerism and a new society and ethos were established, doubts were still present in the way that focus was diverted from new approaches to money in the favour of unsuccessful attempts to reform back to the monetary order of the past (Pringle 49). The stock market crash of October 1929 — years after the death of Gatsby and his American dream — managed to "expose the weaknesses that underpinned the confidence and optimism of the 1920s—poor distribution of income, a weak banking structure and insufficient regulations, the economy's dependence on new consumer goods, the over-extension of industry and the Government's blind belief that promoting business interests would make America uniformly prosperous" (Moore 278), ending the Roaring Twenties and the Jazz Age on a sour note.

Moreover, while plenty economic changes left their mark on the 1920s, a slew social changes were also in full swing. Jazz as a music genre had taken the scene by storm, and with it came a new type of woman, the flapper, representing young women that took on modern styles, behaviours, and values, rejecting the rigidity of past generations (Moore 56).

1.2. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and the Eisenhower Era

Meanwhile, Patricia Highsmith's novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* published in 1955, takes place during the time frame of the 1950's, and reflects the American environment of the time, despite most of the plot occurring in Europe.

As World War II ended and a new decade emerged, the election of president Eisenhower in 1952 brought on a new era to American politics and the American way of life, being the first Republican president in twenty years (Woods 88). With a new presidency, there came overturns in policies: Eisenhower criticised Roosevelt's and Truman's New Deal and Fair Deal, and focused on the investment in the military, all the while trying to subdue federal programmes (Woods 94-95). Minus some mild recession periods, the 1950's saw an overall economic growth, especially as white-collar workers started to outnumber blue-collar workers,

causing the country to officially transition into a post-industrial era (Woods 139). The new ideals strived towards development; suburbia evolved into a tangible reality and encouraged home ownership, especially for new and growing families that would promise a fulfilled and satisfied life (Halberstam 194). This new will for spending further boosted the rise of credit cards, which allowed Americans to make big purchases, at the cost of their own freedom as private debt birthed a new industry revolving around the spending habits of everyday Americans (Woods 140).

The fifties also marked the rise of the era of advertisements. As suburbs were isolated from the cities, most families only saw advertising in the form of a travelling salesman, and while radio advertising had a wider range of consumers, television completely revolutionised the advertising industry (Halberstam 718).

As the economy boomed and spending money became more than encouraged, consumerism became a subculture of its own and even then, a class division was present; the working-class luxuries included television sets and disposable lipsticks, while previously wealthy luxuries such as brand name products, tours around Europe, and new, larger houses were suddenly attainable to the middle-class (Woods 142).

This notion in particular is present in the novel *The Talented Mr. Ripley* as working-class Tom Ripley falls upon wealth after his murder of ship-building conglomerate heir Dickie Greenleaf and is finally allowed to indulge the consumerist habits that are ingrained with his identity: “He loved possessions, not masses of them, but a select few that he did not part with. They gave a man respect” (Highsmith 249). According to Ripley, consumption is a core part of being a member of society, a tool that is used to gain respect from both oneself and his peers.

Although, not everyone had the opportunity to live out this new, consumerist vision of the American Dream. Inflation grew, as well as the amount of debt, and even the middle-class was on shaky ground, most affected being African Americans, factory workers in New England, coal workers in Appalachia, and both black and white Americans who lived in the rural South (Woods 158). To move up the economic ladder, these vulnerable groups needed fundamentals such as education, social security, and job opportunities, which were not available and were thus stuck in a cycle they could not leave, all the while being tantalized by constant advertisements (Woods 158).

2. Genre and the Makings of a Hero

2.1. Jay Gatsby, the Hero of Legends

With the end of World War I, returning soldiers faced the first bout of disillusionment and were fundamentally changed to the point that returning to normal life was not an easy task (Van Spanckeren 60). Modernism as a literary age in turn evolved along with the Roaring Twenties and while unhappy with the conditions within the United States, American authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, and even F. Scott Fitzgerald found solace in Europe, absorbing new ways of thought, which in turn flourished in their own writing and birthing the "lost generation" of writers (Van Spanckeren 60-61).

Fitzgerald's works were often of an autographical nature, which allowed nuances and reflections of the modern age to bleed into his novels; the striving for wealth in a world revolving around consumption, the presence of excess, and a notion of idealism characteristic to Fitzgerald himself (Gray 403). *The Great Gatsby* utilises a first-person narrator, Nick Carraway as a lens through which the story is seen, creating a blend of the romantic with the realistic image of a society run by money and its social conventions (Chase 162). Nick is on the margins of both the wealthy and the middle-class, giving him an insight in to both the generationally wealthy Buchanan's and newly rich Jay Gatsby, and the divide between the two different layers of the seemingly same class. Nick is the character that retells the story, the one that expands on the character of Gatsby and, in turn, builds up the myth that in the end betrayed Gatsby.

Although Nick Carraway is the narrator of the novel, his narration places the titular character Jay Gatsby as the novel's central protagonist. Chase draws similarities between the character of Jay Gatsby and the heroes seen in European archetypes, particularly the one in which a young man of humble beginnings seizes his own destiny and achieves his dreams (163). And the beginnings of Jay Gatsby's story reflect that as Nick Carraway meets Jay Gatsby's father and is given an old book in which a young James Gatz had written a schedule that would help him become successful in life. Despite the grim ending Gatsby met, Mr. Gatz believed that his son could have made it in the world of the wealthy: "'Jimmy was bound to get ahead. He always had some resolves like this or something. Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that. He told me I et like a hog once, and I beat him for it'" (Fitzgerald 142). In fact, it is evident that a young James Gatz had an eye for opportunity as the first time he approached Dan Cody, he transformed into his Jay Gatsby

persona, aware that he had to become someone new in order to succeed: “It was James Gatz who had been loafing along the beach that afternoon in a torn green jersey and a pair of canvas pants, but it was already Jay Gatsby who borrowed a rowboat, pulled out the *Tuolomee,* and informed Cody that a win might catch him and break him up in half an hour” (Fitzgerald 80).

Gatsby was promised a part Dan Cody’s wealth, however, after not inheriting the money, bootlegging played a large part in Gatsby gaining his status. The first of Gatsby’s shady dealings is hinted at during Nick’s first meeting with Meyer Wolfsheim, in which Nick compares Wolfsheim to a thief once he finds out Wolfsheim fixed the 1919 World Series games: “It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people – with the single mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe” (Fitzgerald 60-61). This also aligns Gatsby with the anti-hero archetype of a smuggler that’s associated with historical prohibitions or high taxes (Castille 1).

Authors such as Walter Scott, Robert Burns, and Friedrich von Schiller often portrayed smugglers and bootleggers favourably, affirming Adam Smith’s notion that the fault lies withing the government that interferes with the trade, and not with the smuggler himself (Castille 2). By the time Gatsby comes to the scene, he is placed in a dichotomy of “both a racketeer and an urban pioneer” (Castille 3), making him both a hero and a criminal at the same time. Placing *The Great Gatsby* in the Jazz Age, allows Gatsby’s bootlegging to have an aura of charisma that charms both the public and any suspicions that Nick had towards him (Castille 6). Jay Gatsby is invented from frontier-era stories, an individual in search of wealth and a better life, but the twentieth century had no place for such an anti-hero, evident in the snide remarks Tom Buchanan throws at him: “I picked him for a bootlegger the first time I saw him, and I wasn’t far wrong” (Fitzgerald 109).

Moreover, Gatsby’s smuggler characterisation can further be attributed to the rise of gangsters during the 1920’s. Mirroring real life gangsters such as Al Capone or Lucky Luciano, Jay Gatsby depicts a new sort of businessmen who do not shy away from using violence in order to make money (Brauer 55-56). Starting small and accruing a lot of money is a staple of the American Dream mythos, but by earning his riches through illegal means, Jay Gatsby places himself in between the traditional hero of legends and the modern gangster character of the Roaring Twenties.

2.2. Tom Ripley, the Killer to Root For

Meanwhile, in *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* Tom Ripley starts off as a con artist, in pursuit of petty cash via forged checks, haunted by fear and paranoia of getting caught: "They couldn't give you more than ten years, Tom thought. Maybe fifteen, but with good conduct— In the instant the man's lips parted to speak, Tom had a pang of desperate, agonized regret" (Highsmith 4). Although Tom Ripley seemingly gets away with it, he is still plagued by anxiety to the point that he accepts his potential arrest when first meeting Mr. Greenleaf. Getting away with the checks only makes him bolder and Tom Ripley finds himself in Italy, with no intention of returning Dickie Greenleaf home, living off of the money Mr. Greenleaf was sending him. Finally, this culminates in Ripley murdering Dickie and assuming his identity. This turn of events establishes Ripley as a murderer, a staple of the noir genre.

Tom Ripley is the central character of the novel, and his perspective is told in third person limited, which allows the reader to have insight into the inner workings of his mind. The reader goes through the same thought processes as Tom Ripley, to hear his rationalisations, and try to "undertake the rehabilitation of the murderer—either to 'explain' the causes of his crime […], or to otherwise recover his humanity" (Dale 2).

Categorizing the psychological nature of crime novels of the era before *The Talented Mr. Ripley,* Cohen forms three distinct divisions; one that is predominantly British and consists of a light treatment of murder, one that is primarily American, and the subject faces a noir treatment, and one that features the effect of schizophrenia and murderers that cannot distinguish whether or not they are murderers (55). This further goes along with Cohen's notion that within readers there are "two desires […] that drive the interest in getting inside criminal minds: we want to see something like ourselves, and we want to see something different from ourselves" (55). Tom Ripley goes against all characteristics of the murderers from the previous era—Ripley murders Dickie Greenleaf and there are no excuses found within the narrative, instead producing a certain fascination which stems from Tom Ripley's characterisation (Cohen 57).

Tom Ripley's childhood is marked by the mean aunt who raised him after the death of his parents, and his working-class background. Moving to New York to become an actor, Tom takes up odd-jobs, but never sticks through them, believing that he deserved instant success for his work, unwilling to stay anywhere long enough to reap the benefits: "His main mistake had been that he had never stuck to anything, he thought, like the accounting job in the department

store that might have worked into something, if he had not been so completely discouraged by the slowness of the department-store promotions" (Highsmith 38-39). Tom is ambitious, and also impatient, envious of the wealth the Greenleaf family accrued over its generations. Consequently, since it is impossible for him to find a way in to the family, Dickie becomes a villain in Tom's eyes.

Cohen states that for a villain to be seen as a villain, he has to "be depicted as an irrational (yet tremendously cunning), *unstoppable* monster who always represents a threat by his mere presence, by his continued existence" (60). Tom, who became enamoured with Dickie during his stay in Mongibello, got into a fight with Dickie about his stay in Europe, obviously unwelcome to stay in Dickie's presence. With Dickie still alive, Tom would be under a constant threat of being accused as queer, as someone who belonged outside the circle of the wealthy. In an instant, Tom's view of Dickie changes: "He hated Dickie, because, however he looked at what happened, his failing had not been his own fault, not due to anything he had done, but due to Dickie's inhuman stubbornness. And his blatant rudeness!" (Highsmith 100). Several pages later, Tom murders Dickie, eliminating the threat looming over him.

However, Ripley himself can also be seen as a villain. He kills irrationally, and the thought does not even cross his mind until he and Dickie are already on the boat: "Dickie was swerving very slightly towards the right again, towards the long spit of fuzzy grey land, but he could have hit Dickie sprung on him, or kissed him, or thrown him overboard, and nobody could have seen him at this distance" (Highsmith 103). Tom manages to convince people around him that he *is* Dickie, including Marge Sherwood, the woman who was in love with Dickie, and later books in the Ripley series show that he does not want to stop killing. It is his position as the central character that makes him the protagonist, somebody for the readers to root for. The tension and anxiety of the novel breaks as Tom Ripley arrives to Greece and realises that no police officers are waiting for him there. Cohen poses the question about the ending to *The Talented Mr. Ripley*: "Are we outraged at his escape or happy for him?" (58), establishing that Tom Ripley's status as the hero of the novel is also one of its key mysteries, further muddling his identity.

3. The American Dream and New Identities

3.1. The Death of the American Dream

The most central theme within *The Great Gatsby* is the fallacy of the myth of the American Dream, most evident through the character of Jay Gatsby himself, but also Nick Carraway, Daisy Buchanan's cousin and the narrator of the novel.

The idea of the American Dream gained traction throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, described as a dream "that every American might be able to become rich — not just prosperous, but downright wealthy" (Churchwell 105), even in the 1920's there was pushback. Novels (particularly Sinclair Lewis's *Babbit*), essays, and articles started to pop up, condemning the dream with no substance, immigrants reported that the opportunities resembled indentured servitude, all the while ideas of xenophobia and the mantra of "America first" started to seep into the unstable foundations of the American Dream (Churchwell 105 – 109).

Throughout the novel, there is a distinct divide between the east and the west. While he is related to Daisy, Nick's family arrived in Minnesota in the Midwest and settled down with the humorous sentiment that they come from royalty, yet still aware of their humble beginnings: "The Carraways are something of a clan, and we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch, but the actual founder of my line was my grandfather's brother, who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War, and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on to-day" (Fitzgerald 4). At the beginning of the novel, Nick sets out to New York to work as a bond man, moving to a house in the West Egg, right across the bay of the East Egg, where Daisy and her husband Tom Buchanan settled. Nick calls the West Egg "the less fashionable of the two" (Fitzgerald 6), and describes his neighbouring house, Gatsby's house as "a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden" (Fitzgerald 6). Excess and imitation are evident, a sign that Gatsby is trying to create the image of traditional architecture as opposed to the Buchanan's house, which Nick describes as "more elaborate than I expected, a cheerful red-and-white Georgian Colonial mansion, overlooking the bay" (Fitzgerald 7). The bay between the two Eggs serves as a rift between the two classes, isolating the generationally wealthy from those that have earned their money recently.

This notion is best seen through the divide between the so-called "old money" and "new money" generations. Fitzgerald establishes that the Buchanan's wealth comes from multiple generations accruing it, with Nick learning of Tom's past during his college years at Yale: "His family were 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 rather took your breath away; […] It was hard to realize that a man in my own generation was wealthy enough to do that" (Fitzgerald 7). Moreover, Daisy grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and it was not until her marriage with Tom that she had felt such luxury: "In June she married Tom Buchanan of Chicago, with more pomp and circumstance that Louisville ever knew before. He came down with a hundred people in four private cars, and hired a whole floor of the Muhlbach Hotel, and the day before the wedding he gave her a string of pearls valued at three hundred and fifty thousand dollars" (Fitzgerald 62 – 63). Daisy is thrust in a whole new world, in which she has the riches and the status, but seemingly does not have agency over their life together as a married couple: "This was a permanent move, said Daisy over the telephone, but I didn't believe it — I had no sight into Daisy's heart, but I felt that Tom would drift on for ever seeking, a little wistfully, for the dramatic turbulence of some irrecoverable football game" (Fitzgerald 7). Despite Daisy's apparent dissatisfaction with her life, she still shows a certain degree of disdain towards the west and its new money residents:

> She was appalled by West Egg, this unprecedented 'place' that Broadway had begotten upon a Long Island fishing village — appalled by its raw vigour that chafed under the old euphemisms and by the too obtrusive fate that herded its inhabitants along a short-cut from nothing to nothing. She saw something awful in the very simplicity she failed to understand. (Fitzgerald 88)

Along with the East Egg and West Egg divide, there is also a divide present between the two Eggs and New York present. Nick follows Tom along to the city, describing the way there as "a valley of ashes" (Fitzgerald 20), a bleak partition separating the working-class from the wealthy. This is evident as Tom and Nick arrive at George Wilson's garage, described as "unprosperous and bare; the only car visible was the dust-covered wreck of a Ford which crouched in a dim corner" (Fitzgerald 21). George is a car mechanic, a working-class man unaware of the affair his wife Myrtle is having with Tom Buchanan. Myrtle's affair with Tom allows her to get a taste of the life Daisy has, yet ultimately cannot have due to Tom's marriage and her own background. And yet, Myrtle adapts to Tom's company in the city, changing her personality and mannerisms in order to imitate the wealthy: "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 26).

Meanwhile, along with Nick, Gatsby is also situated in the West Egg, his wealth gained through luck and bootlegging. While the Buchanan's live a lavish lifestyle, their wealth is more casual, a nonchalant aspect of their characters, Gatsby exuberance is loud and made to be seen, taking the form of extravagant parties he holds in the hopes of catching Daisy's eye from across the bay. As a product of that, Gatsby's parties are frequented by both the East Egg and the West Egg attendees, becoming a sort of congregation for the rich, without the east/west and "old money"/ "new money" divides.

In fact, these parties are the first that Nick sees of Gatsby. For the first couple of chapters, Jay Gatsby does not appear as a character, but rather as a mysterious figure in the distance: "fifty feet away a figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbour's mansion and was standing with his hands in his pockets regarding the silver pepper of the stars" (Fitzgerald 19). Gatsby's identity stays a mystery until Nick attends one of his parties and becomes the only person to get an invite to one of Gatsby's illustrious parties. Even once at the party, Nick first encounters rumours of Gatsby rather than the man himself; rumours that he had killed someone, that he was a spy during the war, never doing anything to dispel the rumours, purposefully keeping his persona vague: "It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers form those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in the world" (Fitzgerald 37). Even as Nick meets Gatsby at the party and listens to his story, he is sceptical of Gatsby's background, aware that he is hiding something, or someone, from his past: "And it is with this doubt, his whole statement fell to pieces, and I wondered if there wasn't something a little more sinister about him after all" (Fitzgerald 54).

James Gatz was abandoned, and Jay Gatsby was made in the likeness of a juvenile fantasy of the American Dream, a hope that a new identity could lead to his prosperity: "So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (Fitzgerald 80). While Gatsby managed to manifest a working relationship with Dan Cody that would ultimately lead to an inheritance of twenty-five thousand dollars that was withheld from him. Despite that big loss, Gatsby found a way to gain a substantial amount of money. Jay Gatsby embodied the dreamer that acquired

the wealth, but he did not fit in with those that come from a generational wealth, and moreover is seen as a threat to conservative society and someone below them, as stated by Tom Buchanan after he finds out about Gatsby's and Daisy's affair: "I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well, if that's the idea you can count me out..." (Fitzgerald 106).

Gatsby's death comes as a culmination of events in which he takes the blame for Daisy's driving that killed Tom's lover Myrtle Wilson. This leads to Myrtle's husband ultimately killing Gatsby, who had spent the whole day waiting for a call from Daisy that never came, silently rejecting his proposal of running away. Gatsby dies without fulfilling his aspiration, his own identity half-formed as James Gatz is lost to the past and Jay Gatsby failing to live out the American Dream. With Gatsby's death comes the death of the idealised vision of the American Dream, "the death of hope, and endless disappointment; the loss of wonder, not the realisation of it" (Churchwell 144).

3.2. Killing the American Dream

While Gatsby's death might symbolise the death of the American Dream, the death and subsequent murder of Dickie Greenleaf showcases the collapse of the social hierarchy based around the status of wealth.

Dickie Greenleaf is the son of a ship-building tycoon, who left for Europe as a way of getting away from the family business. Dickie's father approaches Tom Ripley with the ask of bringing Dickie back home: "He remembered now that Dickie's money came from a shipbuilding company. Small sailing boats. No doubt his father wanted him to come home and take over the family firm" (Highsmith 7). Both the father and son adorned signet rings, Mr. Greenleaf's being having a "nearly worn-away crest" (Highsmith 9), and Dickie's being "larger and more ornate" (Highsmith 49), Dickie's own ring being an identifiable symbol of him, one which Tom Ripley later steals to complete his transformation into Dickie Greenleaf. Dickie proudly wears the signet ring on the same finger — the little finger — as his father, flaunting his Greenleaf connection while traipsing across the European continent.

Meanwhile, Tom Ripley represents the working-class American, trying to find his big break. Over the years of job-hopping, he had accrued a myriad of skills that allow him versatility. In between jobs and living off forged cheques, Tom accepts Mr. Greenleaf's offer of a fully paid trip to Europe, allowing him to escape his paranoia over getting caught:

“Something in him had smelt it out and leapt at it even before his brain. Present job: nil. He might have to leave town soon, anyway. He wanted to leave New York” (Highsmith 9).

Tom’s first proper encounter with luxury comes when he arrives to the ship that would take him to Europe, a first-class ticket reserved for him by the Greenleaf's. Returning to his room, Tom spots the gifted fruit basket, a small symbol of gratuity that leaves him overwhelmed, with his lucky break finally dawning upon him: “Tom had never received a bon voyage basket. To him, they had always been something you saw in florist’s windows for fantastic prices and laughed at. Now he found himself with tears in his eyes, and he put his face down in his hands suddenly and began to sob” (Highsmith 33).

Even before setting foot in Europe, Tom Ripley starts to change aspects of his identity to seem presentable to the Greenleaf’s. Embellishing his friendship with Dickie during Tom’s first meeting with Mr. Greenleaf, Tom starts the dinner with the Greenleaf’s truthfully by saying he grew up in Boston, but quickly spirals when stating that he attended Princeton, ready to answer any and all question that Mr. Greenleaf could have asked, although ultimately did not. During the night, Tom entertains these lies, and as he sees himself in the Greenleaf’s mirror, the truth stirred anxiety within him: “That had been the only time tonight when he had felt uncomfortable, unreal, the way he might have felt if he had been lying, yet it had been practically the only thing he had said that *was* true” (Highsmith 21). After accepting the offer, Tom continues lying to his friends and his, stating that he was leaving for Europe for a business opportunity. Leaving the United States, Tom Ripley disconnects himself from his previous life, allowing him to start a new one, with a new ambition.

During his travels, Tom indulges in visiting Paris, Pisa, and Naples before heading to Mongibello where he would find Dickie Greenleaf and Marge Sherwood, an American girl also staying in town. Tom approaches them on the beach and is met with Dickie’s reservations: “Dickie was looking him over, not entirely with approval, Tom felt. Dickie’s arms were folded, his lean brown feet planted in the hot sand that didn’t seem to bother him at all” (Highsmith 45), Tom is already seen as someone suspicious, an outsider, especially knowing that Tom had a connection with his father. Despite the initial coldness, Dickie invites Tom to lunch, allowing Tom an in with Dickie and starting a friendship.

Over the course of the novel, Tom Ripley becomes more comfortable in his new persona, he revels in spending Mr. Greenleaf’s money and getting close to Dickie, but his confidence starts to falter once Dickie begins doubting Tom’s intentions. After Tom and Dickie

get into an argument in which Dickie outright accuses Tom of being queer— and by extension interested in him —because of Tom's apparent disdain towards Marge. Tom denies the claim, and sceptically Dickie gives in: "Well, let's let it go. Marge and I are okay" (Highsmith 82), however, their friendship is already on thin ice, and Dickie starts pulling away more.

After a month of unsuccessful attempts to bring Dickie home, Mr. Greenleaf lets Tom go in an impersonal matter as if Tom were an employee at the Greenleaf's ship-building company: "It was the final blow. With the cool tone— even cooler than his usual businesslike coolness, because this was a dismissal and he had injected a note of courteous thanks in it — Mr. Greenleaf had simply cut him off" (Highsmith 92). With a threat of financial insecurity looming over him, Dickie becomes Tom's only hope towards the lavish life he had gotten a taste of while living on Mr. Greenleaf's money. He does not want to turn back to the life he had back in the United States, Tom has to change his whole identity to successfully fall into high society.

As time goes on, Dickie begins isolating Tom from his circle; uninviting him from the ski trip, refusing to go to Paris with him, barely indulging in their trip to San Remo. Feeling rage and shame, Tom notes Dickie's signet ring once again, another reminder of the status he cannot have, and the ideas about killing Dickie start to sprout: "Now he thought about it for an entire minute, two minutes, because he was leaving Dickie anyway, and what was there to be ashamed of anymore? He had failed with Dickie, in every way" (Highsmith 100). After killing Dickie on the boat, Tom pockets Dickie's rings, stripping him of his status and legacy, allowing Tom Ripley to seamlessly transform into Dickie Greenleaf, giving him another chance at a life he thinks he deserves.

This allows Tom to switch back and forth between identities, depending on the one needed in the moment. Dickie Greenleaf is the one travelling through Italy and Europe while Tom Ripley becomes a vagabond, Dickie is the one that rents an apartment in Rome, Dickie is the one writing letters to Marge, and Dickie is the one socialising with the rest of the wealthy Americans in Europe. Yet, it is Tom Ripley who must handle Dickie's affairs; Tom is the one to speak with Marge about Dickie's whereabouts in Mongibello and Venice, it is Tom that Freddie Miles encounters in the Rome apartment, immediately suspicious of Tom beguiling Dickie. Becoming another threat to Tom's new lifestyle, Tom kills Freddie in Dickie's apartment. Tom Ripley is then questioned by the police about Dickie's involvement in the murder of Freddie Miles, despite Tom being the one to commit it: "Being Tom Ripley had one

compensation, at least: it relieved his mind of guilt for the stupid, unnecessary murder of Freddie Miles" (Highsmith 194).

Tom Ripley and Dickie Greenleaf become mere costumes, worn by Thomas Ripley, who obfuscates the identities not just to the general public, but also himself, allowing him to enjoy both the wealth and luxury of Dickie Greenleaf, and the anonymity and meekness of Tom Ripley.

Furthermore, the backdrop of the European continent allows the American characters to prosper in a different way that they would back in the United States. Finding out that Dickie has spent years in Europe already, sparks a sense of jealousy in Tom, seeing Europe through rose-tinted glasses that is dominated by a world order of the past (Miller 152). When Tom first arrives in Italy, he is amazed as the culture exceeds his expectations: "He had always taken it for granted that the leaning of the Leaning Tower of Pisa was exaggerated. It seemed to him a good omen, a sign that Italy was going to be everything that he expected" (Highsmith 41). For Tom, Europe is a place for reinvention, something that "is not simply transformative; for Tom, it purges an impure past" (Miller 153), an opportunity to leave the ungrateful American tradition that does not want him, leaving him free to try on and pick different identities until Tom finds his place in European society.

The most appealing part is exactly that Europe is not the United States and Ripley's and Dickie's status as Americans turns Europe into "a delightful playground, but they retain their dependence upon the convenience of American commodity culture" (Miller 153). It is the American notion of consumerism and the will to spend money that attracts Tom, gives him the drive to move along the social ladder. While the novel takes on a subtler approach to world politics, certain happenings such as the spread of communism and the conflict in Indo-China, and American culture started to take over Europe, something that Tom outwardly loathes (Miller 154). And just like Gatsby, Tom Ripley shows characteristics of the "buccaneer" archetype, with Tom living off of Dickie's identity as well as his money after forging Dickie's will, all the while spreading a certain type of American colonialism onto European soil (Miller 154).

4. Obsession and Desire

4.1. Gatsby, Love, and Wealth

The novel's titular character Jay Gatsby's characterisation is defined by his strive and ambition for not only wealth, but also for love, specifically his love towards Daisy. Gatsby and Daisy first meet in Louisville, and after a short-lived romance, they are forced apart after Gatsby is set to leave to fight in World War I.

Gatsby's departure sets off a chain reaction for both of them; Gatsby dedicated his whole career to get Daisy's attention, while Daisy was left heartbroken, inconsolable right before her wedding with Tom, aware that her life would not let her love Gatsby: "She began to cry — she cried and cried. I rushed out and found her mother's maid, and we locked the door and got her into a cold bath. She wouldn't let go of the letter" (Fitzgerald 63). Ultimately, after marrying Tom, Daisy adjusted to her new life, all the while Gatsby pursued his dream which subsequently led him to the West Egg, buying a house just across from Daisy.

In fact, Gatsby's superfluous spending is the greatest showcase of his desire, from buying a house simply to get closer to Daisy, to the lavish parties, to him haphazardly throwing his collection of shirts "of sheer linen and thick silk and fine flannel" (Fitzgerald 76), flaunting his newly acquired wealth. Hilgart cites Lacan and that while desire sets up different object, there is no tangible object, noting that desire is not based on what the individual wants, but what the individual lacks (14). Gatsby wishes for wealth, but chases it only to win Daisy over, and once he manages to gain that wealthy status, he is willing to trade it simply to have Daisy's love (Hilgart 18).

However, as much as Gatsby's intentions might be romanticised, his whole identity built on loving Daisy actually revolves around her status and what marrying her could represent for Gatsby. Describing her voice as "full of money" (Fitzgerald 98), Gatsby himself sheds the illusion of any romantic intention. Her voice is described as having "the inexhaustible charm that rose and fell in it, the jingle of it, the cymbal's song of it…High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl…" (Fitzgerald 98), reducing Daisy as a mere means to an end that will finally allow Gatsby to become the man he had always wanted to be. Moreover, Daisy's voice is also called a "deathless song" (Fitzgerald 79), further indicating Daisy's status as something that cannot be bought or made, but rather innate and everlasting.

During their time apart, Daisy's own desires and wishes had changed after she married Tom Buchanan, making her unrecognisable to Gatsby: "'And she doesn't understand,' he said.

‘She used to be able to understand. We’d sit for hours—‘” (Fitzgerald 90), leaving Gatsby torn over his affection for Daisy and his want for wealth and upper-class status. In the end, Gatsby takes the fall for Daisy, ready to not only run away with her, but to face the consequences of her actions which ultimately leads to his death, along with the death of his dreams and desires.

Meanwhile, Nick Carraway, the novel’s narrator exhibits a much more passive role and display of desire as opposed to Gatsby. As a middle-man between the Buchanan’s old money and Gatsby’s new money, Nick’s main desire in telling the story is to tell it truthfully as he considers himself to be “one of the few honest characters that [he] has ever known” (Fitzgerald 50). This notion is emphasised with multiple breaks within the narrative in which Nick addresses the reader directly to add context to his own narration. And yet, despite this apparent neutrality, Nick still gravitates towards Gatsby and the allure of dream (Hilgart 4).

Furthermore, while Nick does not manipulate the plot much beyond reintroducing Gatsby and Daisy to each other, he does paint the narrative to the reader, from the lyrical descriptions of Gatsby’s parties to the state of the Valley of Ashes (Hilgart 10-12). Even during his visit to the city with Tom, Nick is a bystander to what’s happening around him, including his own experience, “finding it more exciting to see himself than to be himself” (Hilgart 15). Nick shows no particular interest in climbing the social ladder or gaining wealth in the same way Gatsby does, his and Jordan’s relationship eventually fizzles out with no intention of serious commitment, and he does not inform Daisy of Tom’s affair, his passivity signifying his whole character. It was Gatsby’s violent death that jerked Nick into action and pushed him to move back west: “After Gatsby’s death the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes’ power of correction. So when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and the wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home” (Fitzgerald 144), leaving the eastern mentality and the memories of Gatsby’s dream behind.

4.2. Ripley and the Lack of Desire

To contrast, while *The Great Gatsby* uses wealth as a tool to attain Daisy’s love, *The Talented Mr Ripley* follows Tom Ripley, who’s main ambition is money, and who often simply mimics reason and rationality, but still lacks other emotions as well as desire (Peters 184). But Ripley’s lack of desire does not indicate a lack obsession that he develops once he arrived in Italy and met Dickie Greenleaf for the first time. Even before murdering and becoming Dickie, Tom develops a one-sided relationship with him; Tom spends his time in Italy obsessing over Dickie’s wealth, loathing any interaction Dickie had with Marge, trying on Dickie’s clothes,

and following Dickie's every move: "Tom had been with Dickie every moment since he had moved into Dickie's house" (Highsmith 71). And while Highsmith's own comments on Tom's sexuality contradict each other, Peters highlights Harrison's observation that Tom does exhibit instances of sexual desire relating to Dickie, but they are ultimately not acted upon (190).

This lack of desire that is present within Tom Ripley can be attributed towards his general lack of compassion towards others and leads to a choice that Tom Ripley does not murder from a place of desire nor from a place of morals (Peters 191). And yet, Ripley's obsession with Dickie continues as Tom mimics Dickie's mannerisms, his style of painting, the mistakes Dickie made while speaking Italian. Furthermore, Tom imagines Dickie surviving the attack and greeting him: "The scene dissolved in swirling yellow-greyness, the colour of the sand in Mongibello. Tom saw Dickie smiling at him, dressed in the corduroy suit he had worn in San Remo. The suit was soaking wet, the tie a dripping string" (Highsmith 166). Moreover, in later novels Ripley marries a French heiress, cementing that while Ripley might be driven by desire, it is not necessarily sexual in nature (Shannon 22). In one instance, after Freddie Miles insinuates that Tom and Dickie have a sexual relationship and Tom impulsively kills Freddie, Tom laughs at the idea, backtracking the accusation back onto Freddie:

> A selfish, stupid bastard who had sneered at one of his best friends — Dickie certainly was one of his best friends — just because he suspected him of sexual deviation. Tom laughed at the phrase "sexual deviation". Where was the sex? Where was the deviation? He looked at Freddie and said low and bitterly: "Freddie Miles, you're a victim of your own dirty mind." (Highsmith 146 – 147)

Furthermore, Tom shows a more violent kind of desire towards Dickie's love interest, Marge Sherwood. During their first meeting, Marge is the one friendly towards Tom while Dickie is more wary of him, but quickly he grows envious of her as he observes their relationship, despite the fact that Dickie had not shown any serious romantic interest in Marge. Tom grows angry at Marge accompanying him and Dickie to trips and tries to cast her out, but Dickie's insistence on including her only irked Tom more, to the point of having violent fantasies: "Tom turned suddenly and made a grab in the air as if he were seizing Marge's throat. He shook her, twisted her, while she sank lower and lower, until at last he left her, limp on the floor" (Highsmith 78). After Dickie's death, Marge visits Tom in Venice, and while Tom lets her stay in his house, he still resents her from the time he spent in Mongibello with Dickie: "Tom hated her. He suddenly remembered her bra hanging over the window sill in Mongibello.

Her underwear would be draped over his chairs tonight, if he invited her to stay here. The idea repelled him" (Highsmith 227). Moreover, Tom disagreed with Marge's leisurely approach to her book, believing that she was bad at her craft as well as using it as an excuse to not actually work: "The book must stink, Tom thought. He had known writers. You don't write a book with your little finger, lolling on a beach half the day, wondering what to eat for dinner" (Highsmith 96).

To Tom, Marge is everything he loathes about America and American consumerist culture, an antithesis of all of his ideals, and yet she is the one reaping the benefits he yearns for; a laid-back lifestyle of enjoying Europe and Dickie's attention.

5. Wealth and Gender

5.1. Femininity in *The Great Gatsby*

With the start of the 1920's, there came a new revolution within female fashion with the rise of the "new woman" and flapper ideal. Despite its unknown specific origins, the flapper label became a moniker for all socially unacceptable behaviours in women: from smoking and drinking, short hair and short skirts, to frequenting jazz clubs and dancing (Zeitz 14).

One of the most famous real-life flappers was F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda, who, in part, inspired the character of Daisy Buchanan. Zelda, just like Daisy, was born in the South and her and F. Scott Fitzgerald's story reflected that of Daisy and Zelda; they met when he was an army lieutenant and spent the summer together, and ultimately they did not get engaged due to Zelda wishing to marry a wealthy man, but once Fitzgerald returned from the war and once he settled in New York, his sole goal became to chase success to win Zelda over (Zeitz 21 – 29).

Each of the three women represents a different type of a "new woman," each shaped by their differing social statuses. Daisy's own femininity is at a crossroads between the traditional and modern with her unruly flapper-like past clashing with the ideals of marrying into old money. On the other hand, Jordan Baker represents the stereotypical "new woman" ideals, her own wealth allowing her to step out of the bounds of traditional femininity with little to no consequence. Opposing the new money femininity is Myrtle Wilson, who is stuck in a working-class environment with not social mobility despite sharing similar "new woman" characteristics as Daisy and Jordan.

While the Jazz Age saw more progress concerning female empowerment, job opportunities and voting rights, Daisy is seemingly stuck in a traditional female role of homemaker, despite her flapper-like past. Before her marriage to Tom, Daisy garnered a reputation as a promiscuous, wild girl, as accounted by Jordan Baker: "Wild rumours were circulating about her — how her mother had found her packing her bag one winter night to go to New York and say good-bye to a soldier who was going overseas. She was effectually prevented, but she wasn't on speaking terms with her family for several weeks" (Fitzgerald 62). Daisy is the counterpart to Tom's traditional masculinity, encompassing the demerits of femininity, marked by passivity and indecision, all the while pushing aside her maternal role (Thornton 460 - 461). Her femininity is a weakness through Nick's eyes, stripping her of any agency and blaming unpredictability on her sex, encapsulating that notion in her reaction after hitting Myrtle in which she is "saved" by Gatsby taking the blame (Alanzi 658).

Moreover, Daisy's lack agency can also be contributed to the fact that Nick, and by extension the reader, only gets an image of Daisy through other people's eyes, most notably, Gatsby's. Jordan is the one that relays Daisy's story to Nick, painting a picture of their meeting before Gatsby had to leave for the war, and other than that, Nick knows Daisy through Gatsby's idealised lens. Despite being her cousin, Nick never actually gets to know Daisy, and mirrors a similar relationship to women as Fitzgerald's other protagonists, moulding Daisy into a mere object of desire, reducing her to wish-fulfilment (Person 252). By choosing Tom over Gatsby, Daisy chooses a life of wealth over one of love, thereby allowing "her life to be shaped forever by the crude force of Tom's money" (Person 254). Daisy's regret culminates in the single scene that features her daughter, in which she mourns the life her daughter will have to live: "She told me it was a girl, and so I turned my head away and wept. '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 16). Daisy is aware from her own experience that her daughter will face hardships simply because she is female, and yet when faced with a choice between Tom and Gatsby, Daisy chooses Tom and the security his status brings, cementing her identity within the old-money society.

Another important female character that appears in the novel is the character of Jordan Baker. Nick first meets Jordan at the Buchanan's mansion, a professional golf player and a friend of Daisy's. Being some years younger than Daisy, Jordan is an example of a true flapper, indulging in Gatsby's parties, promiscuity, and just like Daisy back in Louisville, she has

rumours circulating about her: “I had heard some story of her too, a critical, unpleasant story, but what it was I had forgotten long ago” (Fitzgerald 17).

Jordan’s own progressiveness, being a breadwinner and a sexually active woman, allows her to step away from traditional gender roles, and Thornton classifies Jordan, along with Nick, as androgynous characters (464), with Jordan seemingly “juggling the two halves of her androgynous nature; they totter, and finally succumb to the dominance of the masculine” (Thornton 465). But Jordan’s androgyny and tomboyishness still do not spare her from being scrutinised for her gender.

Due to her class, Jordan is able to get away with morally wrong decisions such as cheating during a golf tournament or even setting Daisy and Gatsby up again, but Nick’s narration places the blame of her dishonesty on her gender, criticising the emergence of the “new woman” (Alanzi 659). Jordan’s role in the novel is important, but largely superficial as she does not get the same type of characterisation as other main characters, she does not do much in the novel that is not connected to Gatsby or Daisy in some way, certifying Alanzi’s claim that Jordan is purposefully set up to be bland as a way to critique the “new woman”. This leaves Jordan in a sort of liminal space; she has both male and female characteristics, but does not fit either mould completely, she is both and important player within the novel, but still superficial and underdeveloped. All the while Jordan is financially privileged to align herself with other male characters of the novel, she is still hindered by her identity as a woman.

To further add, while Myrtle is not a main character within the novel, she is a crucial one as she represents the working-class woman of the 1920’s. Married to George Wilson, a mechanic in New York, Myrtle is also Tom Buchanan’s mistress, allowing her to get a glimpse of the life she could have had if she married into wealth like Daisy. Myrtle represents the “consequence” of marrying out of love rather than practicality, stuck to live as a working-class woman, something that Mrs. McKee notes almost happened to her: “I knew he was below me. Everybody kept saying to me: ‘Lucille, that man’s way below you!’ But if I hadn’t met Chester, he’d got of me sure” (Fitzgerald 29), to which Myrtle defends herself by claiming that she thought she was marrying a gentleman, how she “thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn’t fit to lick [her] shoe” (Fitzgerald 30).

Due to her affair with Tom, Myrtle is more sexual than her upper-class counterparts, Nick’s vision of her painting her as torn between being “so sexual that she cannot control her desires even in front of her husband, or she is a fool who does not know how to behave properly

in such dangerous circumstances" (Alanzi 663-664), furthering the notion that Myrtle does not know the social norms in regards to the upper-class. Still, Myrtle looks down upon the lower-class, even patronisingly interacting with the worker at the apartment, her distaste for her class mirroring Gatsby, but she is not given the same grace as him, instead depicted as a woman motivated solely by greed (Alanzi 664-665). Unlike Daisy, Myrtle does not have the luxury of choosing, her status leaves her stuck in a marriage she is not particularly happy in, unable to move upwards in society. Furthermore, despite the fact that Myrtle leads a similar hedonistic lifestyle to Jordan, it is her working-class status paired with her womanhood that paints her as a morally wrong character.

5.2. Masculinity in *The Great Gatsby*

To contrast, Tom Buchanan symbolises the traditional masculinity of old money families. Since marrying Daisy Tom assumed the role of the man of the house, changing significantly since Nick last saw him during their college years: "Now 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 8). Tom Buchanan uses his physicality to intimidate the women in his vicinity, most namely Daisy and Myrtle, "linking him with the war mentality and the masculine world it represents" (Thornton 459). Meanwhile, it can be assumed that Tom's status gave him the opportunity to not serve in the war as Nick was not able to attend their wedding due to his own involvement in the war, going against the traditional masculine image Tom built up for himself.

Furthermore, Tom old money background is tightly linked with various white supremacist philosophies, first mentioned during Nick's first visit to the Buchanan's mansion, where Tom abruptly changes the topic of why he thinks civilisation is falling apart, and that it is up to people like him, white and wealthy, to "save" it: "'This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It's up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things'" (Fitzgerald 13). Then, later in the novel, as Tom finds out about Daisy's affair with Gatsby, he equates the marriage between two social classes with interracial marriage, something that he sees as the downfall of society: "'Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions, and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between black and white.' Flushed with impassioned gibberish, he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization" (Fitzgerald 106). But Tom's own vision of his masculinity is directly contradicted by his own (in)actions and double standards.

In addition, Tom's conservative viewpoints further establish his hypocrisy, especially when it comes to his treatment of Daisy. Tom was the one to settle Daisy down with their marriage, disconnecting her from her flapper lifestyle, seemingly turning all her attention on to him: "She used to sit on the sand with his head in her lap by the hour, rubbing her fingers over his eyes and looking at him with unfathomable delight" (Fitzgerald 64). However, after their move to the East Egg, Tom's actions become more controlling, evident in his behaviour during one of Gatsby's parties where he accompanied Daisy: "Tom was evidently perturbed at Daisy's running around alone, for on the following Saturday night he came with her to Gatsby's party. Perhaps his presence gave the evening its peculiar quality of oppressiveness — it stands out in my memory from Gatsby's other parties that summer" (Fitzgerald 85). Meanwhile, Tom gets to have his dalliances to the city and meet-ups with Myrtle, but Daisy cannot react the same way as him as their opposing gender roles put them on different levels of the social hierarchy.

In the middle of the new money and old money divide, Nick Caraway serves as a middle-man, not only through a class lens, but also a gender lens, as he does not quite fit the mould of masculine expectations. While Nick is at first enamoured with the world of wealth, after observing both Tom's and Gatsby's attitude towards money, the illusion quickly shatters, and Nick's retreat from the proverbial rat race also distances him from the masculine world, and his more feminine side rises to the surface (Thornton 466). Moreover, Nick manages to utilise the best of both the masculine and the feminine, taught by his father, such as courage and virtue as well as sympathy, which is exactly why Nick succeeds in becoming an androgynous ideal as opposed to Jordan Baker, whose androgyny is composed of the worst traits from both the masculine and feminine, ultimately falling short.

Concurrently, Nick's interactions with other men also indicate a step away from traditional masculine roles. During the party at Tom's apartment, Nick encounters Mr. McKee, a man described as being feminine along with other sardonic descriptors Nick provides, and after Tom strikes Myrtle, they leave the party together and "an erotically charged scene takes place in which Nick's identification and attraction to the 'feminine' artist complicate his earlier humour" (Kerr 414). Right after the encounter in the elevator, there is a quick flash-forward, hinting at a homosexual fling: "... I was standing beside his bed and he was sitting up between the sheets, clad in his underwear, with a great portfolio in his hands" (Fitzgerald 32), and Nick fully steps out of the bounds of that form an image of a traditionally masculine man. Opposing Mr. McKee's initial description is Nick's portrayal of Tom, whose masculinity is in the forefront, eventually connecting his physicality to his wealth (Kerr 415-416). This dichotomy

between Tom's and Mr. McKee's portrayal's showcases a certain uneasiness "with strict divisions between masculine and feminine behavior and personality" (Kerr 416).

Furthermore, Nick centres his masculinity around ideals he learnt from his father, focusing on manhood derived from the upper middle-class, seen in the way Nick mythologises Gatsby to a degree that stays in line with Nick's ideals of a successful man (Kerr 422). Therefore, Nick's alignment himself with Gatsby comes with disregard to those that are immobile socially as Nick forms a romanticised image of Gatsby which Nick later realises is built upon oppression (Onderdonk 205). Nick's identity as a man and his relationship with money go hand in hand; he is an outsider to the world of the wealthy and on the outskirts of gender conformism. Nick becomes the perfect intermediary and his identity is shaped by the fact that he can unobtrusively follow around the rest of the characters throughout the novel. Furthermore, despite being aware of Gatsby's shady dealings, Nick still sides with Gatsby and his vision of masculinity, rejecting the old money ideals and sharply dividing them and Gatsby: "'They're a rotten crowd' I shouted across the lawn. 'You're worth the whole damn bunch put together'" (Fitzgerald 126).

Lastly, the eponymous character Jay Gatsby reflects a type of masculinity that directly foils the masculinity seen in Tom Buchanan. As Gatsby represents new money wealth, with it comes the depiction of the new, changing society of the 1920's. While, as mentioned before, Gatsby is shown as a hero from legends, but still pursues crime to accrue his wealth. Regardless of his criminal inclination, Gatsby not only takes the fall for Daisy, he also stands up for her during his argument with Tom, directly opposing Tom's aggression and indecision (Thornton 461). Moreover, Gatsby contrasts Tom through his hobbies and general likes, "preferring cars and hydroplanes to ponies and sailing as he prefers the modern American girl to the traditional fair heroine" (Thornton 462), showing a distinct difference of Gatsby's new money success and Tom's old money upbringing.

Furthermore, another divergence from traditional masculinity that Gatsby exhibits is evident in the way he takes care on not only his physique, but also his sense of style. At the end of the novel, after Nick receives Gatsby's old copy of *Hopalong Cassidy*, he finds Gatsby's old schedule, where he focuses on physical exercise such as sports or wall-scaling, as well as intellectual betterment as Gatsby emphasises the study of electricity and different inventions as well as practising different ways of fitting in with the upper-class: "Practise elocution, pose and how to attain it" (Fitzgerald 141). The show that Gatsby makes of his shows further

demonstrates Gatsby's care of fashion and how he presents himself: "While we admired he brought more and the soft rich heap mounted higher — shirts with stripes and scrolls and plaids in coral and apple-green and lavender and faint orange, with monograms of Indian blue" (Fitzgerald 76). Later, right before Tom and Gatsby's big fight, it is Gatsby's apparel, along with his other investigations, that leads Tom to the conclusion that Gatsby does not fit in with the wealthy: "'An Oxford man!' He was incredulous. 'Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit'" (Fitzgerald 99). Gatsby might have managed to earn the money to grant him a rich status, but unlike Tom, he was not born and raised in wealth, thus making his own version masculinity directly contradict that of the old money upper-class.

5.3. Gender in *The Talented Mr. Ripley*

While *The Talented Mr. Ripley* does feature a well-rounded cast of characters, the only one that gets fully fleshed out is the novel's main character, Tom Ripley. From the novel's beginning, Tom is put in a situation "where the distinction between illusion and reality is ambiguous" (Sabanci 220), in which Tom believes that Mr. Greenleaf is a police officer looking to arrest him for his forgeries, and once that is proven not to be the case, Ripley reconstructs himself into the person Mr. Greenleaf thinks he is (Sabanci 220-221). This self-conviction is Tom's most crucial tool, as later in the novel, it is his conviction that leads him to the rich and powerful life that he always desired (Sabanci 221). Even before leaving for Europe, Tom is shown feeling like an outsider of society, someone who followed all the right steps to succeed, but never saw the fruition of his success, only further isolating him from his goal, and to remedy his general feeling of uselessness "he shifts focus away from his flaws, instead engaging himself in the world through his perceived strength, his masculinity" (Sabanci 222), another role he has to put on.

Furthermore, while Dickie is still alive, one of Tom's main goals is to gain not only his attention, but also his approval. To achieve this, Tom tries to hang out with Dickie by himself, and as mentioned before, tries to exclude Marge as much as possible. During one instance, Tom is convinced that he failed his mission to bring Dickie back to the states, and fears that Dickie does not want anything to do with him: "Now Dickie had everything, Tom thought, everything he had to offer. He was going to refuse the invitation for a drink too, Tom knew" (Highsmith 55). Ultimately, this leads to Tom's last-ditch effort to stay in Dickie's circle, in which he confesses that he was sent by Mr. Greenleaf and Tom finally getting Dickie's approval, as well as a lunch invite with him and Marge. Moreover, another way that Tom seeks approval is in the form of humour, failing at his first attempt when first meeting Dickie, later

rectifying that with a joke that is sexual in nature, getting a laugh out of Dickie and Tom finally gets an invitation into the masculine world (Sabanci 224-225). Another one of Tom's failed jokes is reflected upon after Dickie relays Marge's accusation of him being queer, claiming that during his time in New York he spent time around "certain groups" (Highsmith 81). He would recycle a joke about his own bisexual inclinations "'I can't make up my mind whether or not I like men or women, so I'm thinking of giving them *both* up'" (Highsmith 81). This instance shows that Tom is willing to change himself to fit in outside the masculine mould, and once called out on telling the joke multiple times, Tom is once again outcast from the group to the point that he "regretted now having ever known him" (Highsmith 81).

As the novel progresses, so does Tom Ripley's obsession with Dickie. Seeing Dickie embrace Marge, Tom is sent into a flurry that leads him to Dickie's own bedroom, putting on his clothes, and mimicking not just Dickie's wardrobe, but also his mannerisms: "He chose a dark-blue silk tie and knotted it carefully. The suit fitted him. He re-parted his hair and put the part a little more to one side, the way Dickie wore his" (Highsmith 78). Hatmaker and Breu refer to Floyd and his statement that modern sexuality is based on different copies without originals, in this instance presenting Dickie and Tom as imitator and imitated, purposefully obfuscated (43). This leads to Dickie clarifying that he is not queer, Tom also negating the fact, Tom is reminded of previous conversations where Dickie denied knowing the same group people that Tom had spent time with: "The tone reminded Tom of the answers Dickie had given him when he had asked Dickie if he knew this person and that in New York. Some of the people he had asked Dickie about were queer, it was true, and he had often suspected Dickie of deliberately denying knowing them when he did know them" (Highsmith 81). This furthers the perception of Tom and Dickie being more alike each other than different, but it is due to their own differing statuses that Dickie is able to deny any association that differs from traditional masculinity, while Tom will always be scrutinised by the wealthy people he meets.

After Dickie's murder and after Tom successfully manages to mimic Dickie's persona, his own masculinity is still unveiled with the appearance of Freddie Miles at his doorstep. Believing that Dickie is still alive, Freddie notices the clothes that Tom is wearing—Dickie's clothes—and immediately suspects that Tom and Dickie are having an affair: "He could feel the belligerence growing in Freddie Miles as surely as if his huge body were generating a heat that he could feel across the room. Freddie was the kind of ox who might beat up somebody he thought was a pansy, especially if the conditions were as propitious as these. Tom was afraid of his eye" (Highsmith 142). In order to not only save himself from being convicted of murder,

as well as to save the prosperous, masculine identity Tom had built up for himself, in the heat of the moment Tom carries out the only solution to his predicament—killing Freddie Miles in the same brutal way he did Dickie.

Additionally, with Tom's assumption of Dickie's identity, he gains the ability to mimic the behaviour of the upper-class, something intertwined with the novel's blurring of masculine and feminine lines that were much more distinct before World War II (Hatmaker and Breu 48). Tom quickly falls into a hole of consumerism, now that he has the money of a ship building magnate heir Tom has the opportunity to spend as much money as he pleases, treating himself to a trip to Paris right after murdering Dickie: "Tom had an ecstatic moment when he thought of all the pleasures that lay before him now with Dickie's money, other beds, tables, seas, ships, suitcases, shirts, years of freedom, years of pleasure" (Highsmith 111-112). Hatmaker and Breu bring up Hoberek's statement that social performance will become a new masculine ideal, as well as that American men will consume more than they produce, transforming into tourists rather than remaining as workers (49-50). Tom Ripley directly "represents a subject that parodies and subverts post-war masculinity by literalizing the most other-directed, consumerist, and flexible dictates of transnational Fordism" (Hatmaker and Breu 50). Tom's consumerism and wish for wealth links him to the life he always thought he deserved, a luxurious and frivolous life. One where he did not have to particularly work for anymore, where his newfound masculinity is still a foggy element, blurred with non-traditional masculine traits from his past.

Although the novel is mostly focused on Tom Ripley and his murder of Dickie Greenleaf, Marge Sherwood is the only prominent female character in the novel. After their first meeting, Tom forms no particular opinion about Marge, but after spying on her and Dickie during one of their usual days and quickly formed a jealousy tendency toward her: "Tom could hear Marge's laugh, and a shout from Dickie in Italian toward the pier. Tom realized he was seeing them on a typical day — a siesta after the late lunch, probably, then the sail in Dickie's boat at sundown" (Highsmith 52). The more Tom observes of their relationship, the more he notices that Dickie does not feel the same way about her: "The Dickie-Marge relationship was evidently what he had supposed it to be at first, Tom thought. Marge was much fonder of Dickie than Dickie was of her" (Highsmith 71). Marge's womanhood and the possibility of a relationship threatened Tom's wish for Dickie's attention, culminating during the scene in which Tom puts on Dickie's clothes for the first time and plays out Dickie explicitly rejecting Marge, as well as the violent fantasy of choking her.

Marge's background is more similar to Tom's rather than Dickie's, coming to Italy from Ohio, showing the both of them a picture of her family home "a plain clapboard house" (Highsmith 70) as opposed to the house Dickie grew up in. Despite their common background, Tom despises Marge and her work ethic, and even after Dickie's death he strings her along, writing her letters as Dickie not only to convince her that he is alive, but to also give her hope that she could have a romantic relationship with him. Once Marge finally finds the courage to break things of with "Dickie", Tom's immediate reaction is to mock her naivety, blaming it on her working-class girlhood: "Ugh! That corn at the end! Ah, Clabber Girl!" (Highsmith 181). Ultimately, while Marge does survive until the end of the novel, her story ends as Dickie's murder gets ruled a suicide and Marge finally stops being a threat to Tom: "Why should he expect any trouble from Marge, he thought. She never had given him any. The suicide was an idée fixe, and she would arrange everything in her dull imagination to fix it" (Highsmith 269).

6. Crime and Privilege

6.1. Consequences in *The Great Gatsby*

One of the biggest themes that is present in both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Talented Mr Ripley* is the overarching theme of crime. In *The Great Gatsby*, Jay Gatsby himself is involved in the criminal underbelly of New York and owes his wealth to bootlegging, and the novel also features a car accident which is caused by Daisy and results in the death of Myrtle Wilson, whilst Tom Ripley starts off his criminal career by forging cheques, and later murdering Dickie Greenleaf and falsifying his will in which Tom inherits most of Dickie's fortune. While both novels feature a criminally inclined protagonist, the consequences of their actions vastly differ, despite their similar backgrounds.

As mentioned previously, Gatsby's rise to the scene sprouted from an old pioneer dream, and once Gatsby finds himself under the wing of Dan Cody, he moves away from his childhood ideals, and after Gatsby is left without Cody's inheritance, he joins the war effort, curbing his progress once more to inevitably join work forces with Meyer Wolfsheim (Brauer 54). Placed in the middle of Prohibition-era America, *Gatsby* exhibits ample opportunities for gambling, stealing stolen bonds or bootlegging, all crimes that can be plausible cause for Jay Gatsby's wealth (Brauer 55). Furthermore, Jay Gatsby's quick rise to wealth sets off alarm bells in Tom's head, making him certain that his new status could only be the result of shady dealings: "'I didn't hear it. I imagined it. A lot of these newly rich people are just big bootleggers, you know'" (Fitzgerald 88). Once he is proven right, Tom dismisses his crimes in favour of blaming him for Daisy's infidelity, deeming that worse than any actual crime he had committed: "Then I turned back to Gatsby — and was startled at his expression. He looked — and this is in all contempt for the babbled slander of his garden — as if he had 'killed a man'" (Fitzgerald 110). At first, Nick is horrified to find out that Gatsby has associated himself with criminals, although as he further deifies Gatsby's persona "[h]e finally decided that it is not Gatsby who is to blame but his adherence to a corrupt dream" (Parr 672), blaming the system for Gatsby's turn to crime and releasing Gatsby from any personal responsibility. Although Nick displaces the blame the American Dream, he contradicts himself by asserting that Gatsby does hold responsibility for his choices that concern his pursuit of Daisy (Parr 673).

This leads to Gatsby's greatest act of responsibility — taking the blame for Myrtle's death after it was Daisy that hit her with his car. After their argument, Tom sends Daisy and Gatsby home in his car, a bright yellow Rolls-Royce, a symbol Gatsby thinks "will advertise

his wealth and new status" (Lance 26), another instance of his effusive spending habits. However, during the ride home, it is Daisy that is behind the wheel, not Gatsby, and it is her who hits Myrtle, leaving her dead on the street to die. Gatsby reveals the details of the accident after the fact, stating that he tried to stop the accident from happening: "Well, first Daisy turned away from the woman towards the other car, and then she lost her nerve and turned back. The second my hand reached the wheel I felt the shock — it must have killed her instantly" (Fitzgerald 118), as well as that he would take the blame for the accident. In the end, Gatsby is the only one who takes responsibility for the accident as his flashy car allowed George Wilson to recognise its owner and ultimately kill Gatsby in his own mansion, all the while Daisy is safe in East Egg with Tom. The aftermath of the accident only furthers the decay of the American Dream as it leaves innocent three dreamers, Gatsby and the Wilsons, dead while Daisy, who married into old money society, faces no repercussions.

6.2. *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and Escaping the Law

Whereas *The Great Gatsby* showcases the death of the American Dream through the brutal death of characters that had to work to earn their money, *The Talented Mr Ripley* flips the script and follows the brutal murders of the generationally wealthy at the hands of a working-class Tom Ripley. Tom Ripley's actions distance him from the stereotypical crime fiction "good guy" protagonist and at the same time can be identified morally evil, but also someone who sees no justice at the end as Tom commits murder for no other reason than his self-interest and then continues living (mostly) normally within upper-class society (Peters 210-214). Peters differentiates Ripley from a common serial killer as he lacks the euphoria for murder associated with serial killers, rather he kills for his own monetary benefit, as well as the fact that Tom can justify each of his murders (215), as if he had no other choice: "He hadn't wanted to murder, it had been a necessity" (Highsmith 180).

After murdering Dickie, a new world opens, Tom Ripley is reborn, and a new identity formed that is more malleable than the Tom Ripley back in New York: "This was the clean slate he had thought about on the boat coming over from America. This was the real annihilation of his past and of himself, Tom Ripley, who was made up of that past, and his rebirth as a completely new person" (Highsmith 127). However, the new Tom Ripley still shows some social ineptitude as the old one and a growing detachment to others as well as the setback of his upbringing leaving isolating him in rich company and socially dislocated (Stolarek 150).

Moreover, despite these hinderances, Tom's new adaptable identities allow him to slip past the cracks of law enforcement and essentially consequence-free. Unintentionally entangling an already dead Dickie Greenleaf with the murder of Freddie Miles, the police catch up on the fact that Tom Ripley had not been seen since that fateful day in San Remo, leading them to believe that Dickie Greenleaf could have also murdered Tom as Dickie's body was found in the same area Tom and Dickie had sailed: "Dickie Greenleaf had twice been on the scene of a murder, or near enough. The missing Thomas Ripley had taken a boat ride November twenty-fifth with Dickie Greenleaf. Ergo—" (Highsmith 171). This leads to Tom having to switch back to his old persona, and once it is established that he is alive, he relocates to Venice where he faces his final hurdle— private detective McCarron, hired by Mr Greenleaf himself. Scrubbing his fingerprints off of Dickie's luggage and convincing both Mr Greenleaf and Marge that Dickie could commit suicide, leaving Tom not only innocent, but not even a suspect in the case. The underlying anxiety of the novel still followed as "Tom imagined the worst sometimes, especially at dusk when he felt more depressed than any other time of day" (Highsmith 271), worried that at any moment he could be caught and arrested. It is not until Tom sets foot in Greece with no police waiting to arrest him, Dickie's inheritance bestowed upon him, that he realises that he is finally free and that he owes it all to Dickie: "It was his! Dickie's money and his freedom, and the freedom, like everything else, seemed combined, his and Dickie's combined" (Highsmith 289). Further demonstrating that if *The Great Gatsby* shows the death of the American Dream and that only the established wealthy can prosper, *Ripley* proves that the only way to achieve that dream is through murder.

Conclusion

Comparing these novels, it is evident that in both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, class status is an aspect prevalent in all aspects in the formation of a character's identity. Both novels also break the mirage of their respective decades, with *The Great Gatsby* shining a light on the growing impossibility of achieving the American Dream, while *The Talented Mr. Ripley* builds upon the impossibility, while also providing solution which strips the pursuer of their own identity. James Gatz discarded his past and created Jay Gatsby in hopes of becoming successful, and after meeting Daisy, made it his main goal to become wealthy enough to win her love over in order to finally fit into old money society and achieve his dream. Even if it meant using somewhat illegal means, Gatsby still held onto the belief that he could make it. To contrast, Tom Ripley knew that the system was not fair towards him and, once he murdered Dickie, he used his and Dickie's identity interchangeably at the sacrifice of his old self.

Moreover, Gatsby's and Ripley's desires fundamentally differ as Gatsby's fixation on Daisy leaves a romantic image of humanity that cannot be attributed to Tom Ripley as his main desire stems from the aspiration of wealth and the material. Whereas Tom does show a certain obsession towards Dickie while he is still alive, once Tom kills Dickie, he is nothing more than a vehicle for his actual desires, as seen with Tom's murder of Freddie Miles. Furthermore, *The Great Gatsby* also showcases that Nick Carraway's main desire is to tell the story as truthfully as possible, passively existing as the plot moves in his vicinity, but once Gatsby dies he realises that he never had the same desires as Gatsby and moves back to the comfort of the American Midwest, aware that Gatsby's dream could never be fulfilled.

Additionally, there is a strong connection between class in gender as in *The Great Gatsby*. Daisy Buchanan reaps the benefits of old money despite being unsatisfied whereas Jordan Baker presents the typical image of the "new woman," as well as Myrtle Wilson, it is Jordan's status that allows her to have a more privileged and easy-going life. Meanwhile, Tom Buchanan mirrors Daisy's traditional gender roles as he presents himself as the intimidating man of the family, facilitating white supremacist views, all the while being hypocritical towards Daisy by having a somewhat public affair with working-class Myrtle Wilson. Gatsby, on the other hand embodies the modern man, caring about his appearance and showing off his wealth, going against traditional masculinity. Nick Carraway is even further removed from masculinity, teetering the edge with femininity, and exploiting the virtues of them both in order to create the best version of himself, his own middle-class status reflecting those virtues. Meanwhile, Tom Ripley's masculinity is constantly brought into question, first by Dickie and

later by Freddie Miles, but after assuming Dickie's identity Tom manages to blending his consumerist desires into the new masculine ideal. Ripley also displays a resentment towards Marge Sherwood, the only prominent female character in the novel; blaming her naivety on her womanhood and believing that she is of no use to him after Dickie's death.

Lastly, both novels deal with the consequences of killing someone, accidentally and purposefully. In *The Great Gatsby*, while Gatsby acquired money through bootlegging, it is not until he plans to take the blame for Daisy's crime and is punished for it, whereas she is exonerated. Furthermore, to Tom Ripley, his murder of Dickie is a clean slate for him, an opportunity to finally become successful, and his identity-swapping allows him to be absolved of both murders, earning him absolute freedom once he manages to properly forge Dickie's will. Looking at these novels side to side shows an even more dramatic shift in the American Dream mythos as *The Great Gatsby* depicts a depressing death of the American dream Meanwhile, *The Talented Mr Ripley* deploys a sort of revenge story in which Tom Ripley's only hope of achieving the American is by murdering Dickie, a typical beneficiary of generational wealth, and assuming his identity, leaving Thomas Ripley in the past.

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