

THE GREAT GATSBY AND ITS ALLEGORICAL MEANING

O GRANDE GATSBY E O SEU SENTIDO ALEGÓRICO

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Abstract: This article seeks to analyze the novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as a narrative and iconographic representation of the American Dream. The first part of the article highlights the concept of allegory presented by Walter Benjamin in describing the engraving *Angelus Novus* (1920) in which he associates iconography and narrative. The concept will be tied to the novel as a key to reading and interpretation. In the novel, the American Dream associated with the desire for material goods is reconnected to a pastoral aura through the character Gatsby, idealized male projection. This aspect is going to be highlighted in the second part of the article. The conclusion resumes the resizing of the American Dream as a manifest allegory in atemporal space. Space, in the novel, is constructed as a system in which the belonging of characters to places determines their relations of power.

Keywords: Allegory; The Great Gatsby; American Dream

Resumo: O presente artigo busca analisar o romance *O Grande Gatsby* (1925) como uma representação narrativa e iconográfica do Sonho Americano. A primeira parte do artigo destaca o conceito de alegoria apresentado por Walter Benjamin ao descrever a gravura *Angelus Novus* (1920) em que associa iconografia e narrativa. O conceito será atrelado ao romance como chave de leitura e interpretação. No romance, o Sonho Americano associado ao desejo por bens materiais é reconectado a uma aura pastoral através do personagem Gatsby, projeção masculina idealizada, aspecto a ser destacado na segunda parte do artigo. A conclusão retoma o redimensionamento do Sonho Americano como uma alegoria manifesta em espaço atemporal. O espaço, no romance, é construído como um sistema em que o pertencimento de personagens a lugares determina suas relações de poder.

Palavras-chave: Alegoria; *O Grande Gatsby*; Sonho Americano

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1. INTRODUCTION

Critics still point to *The Great Gatsby* (1925) as one of the novels which invest in the American Dream's incongruities and dualism. Francis Scott Fitzgerald, the author, seemed to be convicted about its irreconcilable contradictions presenting in the novel a tension regarding the presence of immigrants in the remapping of urban landscape in America. On one hand, there is the fear of losing boundaries between the old stock white Anglo-Saxon Americans and the new rich. The incongruities between pastoral and bourgeois ideals, idealism and materialism, self-made men and greed are some of the contradicting elements which compose an iconographic representation of the American Dream in the novel.

In the first part of the article, the focus is analyzing how Walter Benjamin's concept of allegory can be useful to interpret the novel because it expresses a way to reconcile apparent oppositions concerning a dual meaning in the imagery created by the narrative in relation to the American Dream.

In the second part, Fitzgerald's novel creates a dream-like atmosphere in which levels of meaning move parallelly in a coherent mode as extended metaphors, so that they belong to a timeless space, as an image that goes on, in an endless repetition. The richness of images, similes, and metaphors create a ghostly world which melts in the air right before the end of the narrative. Its effect is, among others, the sensation that the narrative works in order to repeat a ritualistic pattern, in which the narrator knows its ending in advance, but needs to tell the story in order to make it re-signify by adding a mystic brightness to it. The narrative reinforces the greatness of the main character Gatsby in an ironic dual mode, as a parody of the self-made man. Simultaneously, there is also a positive valorization of Gatsby's idealism, as a trace that has been subjugated in the American Dream of success in the 20s. In

contrast, there is the emptiness of the material world expressed through characters as Daisy, his ultimate object of desire.

2. THE AMERICAN DREAM AS AN ALLEGORY IN THE NOVEL

In the ninth theses of the essay, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1939), Benjamin, inspired by a Paul Klee painting called *Angelus Novus*, describes the course of human history as one which accumulates destruction.

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistible propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. (BENJAMIN, 1985, p.226)

He presents an allegorical description of the painting in which the angel turns his backside to the future and faces the past with horror. The angel is shocked by the view of the amount of ruins that the past accumulates. The celestial figure cannot turn away because the force of progress impels him to move in the direction of the future. He still gazes at the past. He helplessly faces the catastrophe of human history.

Benjamin’s view of history is represented allegorically. He suggests that the connection between past, present and future is not linear. The past and the present are concentrated in similes, which are allegorical images. In his study of Proust, for example, he distinguishes memory from memorization. While memory is what protects our impressions about the past, memorization is what disrupts these impressions in order to force them to re-signify reappearing constantly in the present.

Distanced at the beginning from its source, allegory will set out on an increasingly futile search for a signifier with which to recuperate the fracture of and, at its source, and with each successive signifier the fracture and the search begin again: a structure of continual yearning, the insatiable desire of allegory. (FINEMAN, 1981, p. 45)

In his conception of history, there is no place for authentic experiences. There are only experiences of shock [*chockerlebnis*] as consequences of the decline of the aura. The shocks annul the false continuity of experience. Benjamin projects his perception about Modernity in the figure of the angel. According to Benjamin, the 20th century also experienced a different perception of time. Society is subjugated to the myth of progress, looking forward ceaselessly. Benjamin conceives the passage of time as empty moments in succession. Thus, the only possible experience in modernity is the experience of shock. It is necessary to freeze the movement. A past experience whose meaning is embodied in an object still present can then be observed. In this sense, the past can be reconnected to the present due to the observation of the object which carries its meaning by the experience of shocking. And this is provided by the allegory.

Benjamin's conception of time is not chronological, but cyclical, in the way that material objects carry a metaphysical meaning that the author calls aura. It can be recovered, but only in moments of extreme sensorial provocation. Objects carry an aura, which is conceived as the presence of a distance. Feeling this aura is a kind of religious experience. The word religion is derived from a latin word- religio and the verb religare, which represents the re-establishing of a link between the human and the spirit, the subject and the object, the physical and metaphysical. It represents the interference of the "divine" order over the material world. What Benjamin proposes is the

existence of a link between what is conceived as sacred and what is profane, between the spiritual and its material manifestation.

In the novel, the narrator Nick faces the American society of the 20ths. He expresses his indignation, but he stands passive by facing the decay of what he conceives as moral values in the hands of high society. His narrative presents a ghostly world, a suggestive connection: the myth of American origin based on idealism is added to the wish for material possessions. The main character builds his “castle” on a “fairy’s wing” which stands for a belief in Manifest Destiny¹⁷³ in American Exceptionalism¹⁷⁴ and in the American Dream¹⁷⁵.

There is metaphoric equivalence onto metonymic succession. In the narrative, the plot is related to structures of experience which are psychological, metaphysical and literary- from which the text derives its own authority and indeed much of its literary interest. For instance, female characters in the novel as Jordan, Daisy and Myrtle are essential figures which represent, at one level, stereotyping caricatural distinctions which are conceived as projection of women types based on a male perspective. At another level, they represent a unified presence called “woman”. As one level carries the other, all women are negatively conceived as deceitful and morally degraded.

The American Dream impels the individual towards a promising future, but makes him melancholic, longing for a past unity. Benjamin explains this

¹⁷³ “Manifest Destiny” is conceived as the belief that American’s progress was divinely ordained. Western settlements were conceived as being inevitable (HANLDEY, 2002, p.162).

¹⁷⁴ “American Exceptionalism” is the notion that Americans live in a land apart where they can begin the world again. The ideal is to fight abroad and to return home after a new conquest (HANLDEY, 2002, p.162).

¹⁷⁵ The “American Dream” is here conceived as the belief in endless progress, self-creating, achievement and success (HANLDEY, 2002, p.163).

feeling as the result of the loss of what he calls “aura”. According to him, the 20th century starts in an atmosphere of transience “As the individual loses faith in oneself, in others and in the entire world, the harmony between the human and divine spheres, between religion and justice, and between intellectual and moral values is substituted by the paradox (BENJAMIN, 1977, p. 167).

The outbreak of historical crisis with the two World Wars created the collapse of a system of beliefs. The desire for continuity and permanence was replaced by movement and fast changes, even in the perception of time. The industrial society which began in the 19th century brought technical improvements that altered the relation between the work of art and its context of production. The work of art achieved its autonomy in terms of aesthetic value, but it also was conceived as a commodity whose appreciation lost a private domain to become public. According to Benjamin’s perception, the work of art lost its ritual value and acquired an exchange value. In this sense, all human experiences were conceived with a fragmented meaning and they lost their aura. Modernity prioritized information and not communication. In this sense, the symbolic and allegoric status of language were replaced by the need to inform.

In order to further explain it, there is necessary to reconsider Walter Benjamin’s concept of allegory. Allegory is described as an extended metaphor¹⁷⁶ since it is a representation conveying an implied meaning other than the literal one. When we read a story and conclude that there is another meaning which is parallel to the surface meaning, and that this story carries

¹⁷⁶ Metaphor is based on a combination of two Greek words meaning “to carry over” or “to carry across”. It is a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea used in the place of another by way of suggesting a likeness or analogy between them. The metaphor has at least two fixed meanings: the literal and the other that it stands for or suggests (MURRAY, 1978, p. 83).

both together, then we have a tip to analyze it as an allegorical work. The formula is “by this, I also mean that”.

Allegory is a concept usually related to art as painting and sculpture. Boiticelli's *Primavera* is a famous allegorical painting. The female figure of Justice, blindfolded and carrying a scale is allegorical. Drawings conveying a moral lesson were usually accompanied by a verse which commented on their significance.

On the other hand, in literary tradition it is possible that an entire work is allegorical, or it may contain one or more allegorical episodes. Some examples of allegorical works are: Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, Bunyan's fable *Pilgrim's Progress*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The first book of Oliver Swift's *Gulliver Travels* is a political allegory; his *Tale of a Tub* is a religious one. Incidental allegory is found in Book Two of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is based on the biblical text, which presents an allegory of Sin and Death. Allegory is considered a mode of interpretation. It is usually observed in fables¹⁷⁷ or parables¹⁷⁸ when the story is of greater length, not necessarily restricted to one single idea, and less concerned with teaching. It can be used to expose without focusing a deplorable situation, or to hold characters up to ridicule. Each detail of a story may represent something else. Myths are other forms of allegory. They are formulated to explain why our world is as it is, why things happen as they do. They represent fixated lays which supposedly rule the universe. All myths can be read at more than one level, carrying meanings to convey in addition to the surface ones.

¹⁷⁷ Fable is a moral short story, in which talking animals and their activities are presented as parallels with human being's behavior (MURRAY,1978, p.5).

¹⁷⁸ Parable is familiar to the readers of the Gospels, being the means used by Catholics to teach. It is a more appropriate name for a short illustrative story designed to answer a single question or to point one definite moral. A parable is created to teach, as an efficient indirect mode. The characters do not stand for anybody or anything else (MURRAY, 1978, p.5).

According to August Fletcher (1964), allegory¹⁷⁹ is fascinating because it seems to be always incomplete. It carries a desire for unknown wisdom. The dream-vision is a characteristic framing and opening device of allegory. There are hints but the meaning is not clearly stated. Psychoanalysis assimilated the great archetypes of allegorical imagery into its discourse observing the patient's desires and obsessions, while in literature, archetypes are valued as themes and as structuring principles. Allegory, in this sense, keeps a distance among signifier and signified. According to Jakobson (1971) it is the supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function, which does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous.

Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) concept of allegory provides elements that justify this statement. Benjamin studied the influence of technological innovations upon art and society, art's autonomy, and the function of the narrator besides other elements linked also to philosophy and history at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. He explained this period based on his study of Baudelaire's poetical work, and on Proust, Kafka, among others. He pointed out the recurrence of allegorical figures in the Modern period.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1977) Benjamin fully conceives and examines the concept of allegory. He considers that allegory was much more natural to Renaissance writers than to Modern ones. The Renaissance view of the Universe, in terms of various levels of correspondences, encouraged the tendency to discover relationships in every direction and to express one thing in terms of another, the forms of allegory. It has been compared to a description in code. In this sense, the reader needs to discover what the person or events in the story stand for. "Intimately bound to a mode of writing that

¹⁷⁹ According to its etymology, allegory means to "say the other." In it, every element means something else, something different from the reality its literal sense shows us (MURRAY, 1978, p.1).

resembles the pictographic script-a hieroglyph- which carries along a codified meaning, allegory encompasses and expresses the baroque/modern view of the world” (BENJAMIN,1977, p. 183).

Benjamin distinguishes allegory from symbol. According to him, in the Classical Age- which includes the Renaissance and Neo-Classicism, the symbol reflects the human being’s insertion in nature. The human sphere is considered an extension of the divine one. Classical art maintains the secular conception that every work of art must express, in its own way, the whole of reality human beings are able to understand. The goal of the artist is to seize what is essential and what transcends besides the desire of perpetuating the status quo and the order. The symbol is the most satisfactory means to represent such a vision. There is a strict relation between a concept and an idea, in the sense that what really matters is the idea that is bound to the symbol.

During Romanticism the symbol, rather than the allegory, was given priority, whereas allegory was neither valued nor understood. In the nineteenth century, W. B. Yeats (1865-1959), in his critical work proposes a distinction between symbolism and allegory pointing that symbolism is the only possible expression of some otherwise inexpressible spiritual essence, while allegory is an arbitrary translation. Many theorists during Romanticism formulated theories on the symbol, among them Greuzer who introduced the category of time to the pair-symbol/ allegory. According to him, “Whereas there is momentary totality in the symbol, there is a progression in a series of moments in the allegory” (GREUZER apud BENJAMIN, 1977, p.187). Greuzer believed that the conception of allegory brought with it the development of the myth. In this sense, Benjamin considers that allegory is an image which progresses.

Benjamin blames romantic aesthetics for having subjected the philosophy of art to a false concept which emphasizes the symbol¹⁸⁰. He argues that in Romanticism, “the symbol is taken out of its theological sphere, by displacing the relations of transcendence invested in the medieval and classical symbol to the relation of indivisible unity between form and content” (BENJAMIN, 1977, p.185). Classicism and Romanticism undervalued allegory as the means that carries on a view that accounts for a situation of crisis. But according to Benjamin: “The symbol is coherent and predictable, while in allegory there is no essentiality in the relationship between idea and concept” (BENJAMIN, 1977, p. 162).

3. NICK PROJECTION THE AMERICAN DREAM: GATSBY AS AN ALLEGORICAL CHARACTER

Benjamin considers that each work of art is a montage of moments in time, which present a version of the past in an apparently unified and continuous form. What is significative repeats itself in time and space. In this sense, retrospection also means projection. According to him, the allegorical mode of expression picks up the emptiness experienced by the *flaneur* as the presence of something that is not completely there anymore but is also not completely absent.

¹⁸⁰ Literary symbolism comes about when the objects signified by the words stand for things other than themselves. Certain objects are commonly associated with fixed qualities or ideas: the cross with Christianity, the eagle with heroism, the rising sun with birth, the setting sun with death, the dove with peace, and so on. There is also the symbolism of colors. Color symbols have no fixed meaning but derive their significance from a context: green may represent innocence, hope or Irish patriotism. Symbolism may be described as the art of expressing emotions not by describing them directly nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are by re-creating them in the mind of the reader through the use of unexplained symbols (MURRAY, 1978,p. 156-157).

As an example, if we consider the novel in focus, *Gatsby*, the main character is also embodied in the narrator Nick, who feels a quality of divine mission in Gatsby's quest of recovering an extremely intense experience from the past in order to revive it in the present. Gatsby's mission analyzed as an allegory implies the recovery of the mystic and religious meaning in the American Dream, the aura which was lost by material possessions.

Jay Gatsby, following Benjamin Franklin's lessons when preparing schedules, has prepared himself to embody North-American history. Nick, the middle-class narrator comprehends from the beginning the awful future reserved for Gatsby because the hero's story was already inscribed in History: the connection between spiritual idealization and material possessions was in decline in the period between the two World Wars. The 19th century transcendentalist ideals of the American Dream were focused on reaching one's goals by honesty and hardworking. It was replaced, in the 20th century, by the idea of achieving success by way of illegal money. Materialistic possessions were explicitly required for a person to be accepted in American society besides implicit racial and ethnic requirements.

In the novel, Fitzgerald uses a process of allegorical montage in order to expose this American believe creating *Gatsby*. The USA financially benefited by the wars, but simultaneously, the loss of idealism spread among people. Nick, the narrator, knows what happens to a middle-class individual who is deluded about America, and about entering in a world in which he will not be accepted. There is not real class mobility in the sense that Daisy, the upper-class fancy woman cannot really leave her position. Nick is the narrator of the allegory, which he calls "a story of the West" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.183). He knows about the infinite hope of the frontier spirit, and he also has witnessed the corruption of the American promise of equality for all.

The use of myth, of official historic factuality and imaginary geographic division builds Gatsby's greatness as a strong character. On the other hand, Nick's point of view remains as a hint to ask oneself what Gatsby actually embodies. He achieves a moral ideal due to his "sacrificial" death. The death is necessary to keep the idea of the American Dream alive. The incongruities, the lapses, the silences, the voices of secondary characters are a shadow compared to the lights upon him. If he cannot possess Daisy, the dream is not complete and he must die to maintain the Dream, to show it is still worthy to die for.

The American Dream has a gender, a male one. Along with his desire to possess Daisy, there is the focus on her arrogance and sophistication, there lies her unhappy life as a wife. According to the narrator, she lacks a sense of morality. Nick's moral indignation impels him to skepticism and conformism. There is also a moral condemnation to the mistress: Myrtle's vitality will also lead her to die. There lies a moral judgment. Her dissatisfaction with her life surrounded by poverty, with her husband George Wilson's ghostly air and apathy is not considered by Nick.

The novel re-inscribes the value of a nation with a holy mission of purity. The narrator Nick keeps Gatsby as the only character which is not corrupted by material possessions, because they mean nothing without Daisy's appreciation. Gatsby embodies the spirit of the West which is material looking for an aura. The West stands for the United States of America, but it also exposes its wounds, as, for instance, the existence of poor suburbs. There are hints about the nation's pragmatic inability to include others, especially the ones who do not belong to a WASP model. The novel exposes explicitly social distinctions in a society, whose division is based on greed, tradition and ownership of money. The Middle-West is conceived as the nest of moral virtue, as a refuge from corruption. It is the only holy place in the novel, which obviously represents a political position.

This recovering of the American's dream aura can thus be observed in *The Great Gatsby*. Nick embodies a view of History that is similar to Walter Benjamin's who observed emblematic marks of the past in present objects. He observes the sacred ideal of the American Dream in Gatsby's story. The novel presents a condensed view of space which links past, present, and future simultaneously. It expresses the melancholic and alienated feeling present in the bourgeois atmosphere in the beginning of the 20th century, material possessions without a soul, Gatsby without Daisy. Fitzgerald's novel emphasizes the sense of loss related to this aura. He brings it back to the American Dream with Gatsby and values all he represents: his foreignness, his gender, his strong will and character, his individualism of self-made man.

There is an unbalance between pastoral ideals and materialism represented in the novel. Gender, racial and ethnic conflicts are associated to this dualism. The narrative expresses America's internal conflicts about marriage, breeding, social position, the importance of money, the meaning of success. It challenges the readers because there is simultaneously the end of the Dream and its metaphysical resurrection as embodied in all Americans. It shifts from Gatsby to a collective dimension. There is a re-investment in the American Dream as a mode of continuous change. Gatsby's death achieves the allegorical level. In this sense, he dies heroically in order to maintain the Dream alive reinforcing the reader's idealism in a huge collective enterprise.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before of us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter-tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms further [...] And one fine morning [...] So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.188)

Some of allegorical elements present in the novel are: the dialectic representation of time, the social euphoria with materialism, and the tension

brought by the disbelief in idealism in the post-war period. The allegorical gaze conquers the myth of an archaic past, a paradise lost, which is conceived as a superficial illusion, a ghostly dream, though still desirable. The novel exposes the super valorization of commodities. Gatsby's shirts and the objects of his house acquire a spiritualized meaning due to Daisy's gaze:

He hadn't once ceased looking at Daisy, and I think he revalued everything in his house according to the measure of response it drew from her well-loved eyes. Sometimes, too, he stared around at his possessions in a dazed way, as though in her actual and astounding presence none of it was any longer real. (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.98)

Nick observes the metaphysical presence in material elements in a "world material without being real" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.168). He can be compared to Benjamin's *flaneur*, identified in Baudelaire's poetical work. The narrator observes life in society, but his melancholic gaze induces him to feelings of uncanny and alienation.

Through all he said, even though his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something- an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as through there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was incommunicable forever. (FITZGERALD, 1925, p. 118)

Nick is a skeptic and he feels contradictions in the air. This can be observed in his description of Gatsby, when he links religiosity to immorality; fantasy to reality conceiving Gatsby as the ideal American self-made man:

He was a son of God [...] – and he must be about His Father’s business, the service of a vast, vulgar, and meretricious beauty [...] For over a year he had been beating his way along the south shore of Lake Superior as a clam-digger and a salmon-fisher or in any other capacity that brought him food and bed. His brown, hardening body lived naturally through the half- fierce, half-lazy work o the bracing days. He knew women early, and since they spoiled him he became contemptuous of them, of young virgins because they were ignorant, of the other because they were hysterical about things which in his overwhelming self-absorption he took for granted.

But his heart was in a constant, turbulent riot. The most grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night. A universe of ineffable gaudiness spun itself out in his brain while the clock ticked on the washstand and the moon soaked with wet light his tangled clothes upon the floor. Each night he added to the pattern of his fancies until drowsiness closed down upon some vivid scene and oblivious embrace. For a while these reveries provided an outlet for his imagination; they were a satisfactory hint of the unreality of reality, a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy’s wing. (FITZGERALD, 1925, p. 105- 106)

According to Lionel Trilling¹⁸¹ “Fitzgerald transcends the novel of Jazz Age, because he takes the given moment as a moral fact” (MIZENER, 1955, p.11). Gatsby needs Daisy; and this need will destroy him. But his battle is unavoidable. She becomes his holy-grail. Gatsby personifies the incongruity between pastoral and bourgeois ideals. He is a pastoral man in a bourgeois capitalist society. Dislocated in time and impelled by an “instinct towards his future glory” (FITZGERALD, 1925, p. 106), he suffers the consequences of a fragmented society in which the individual tries to reach fulfillment, but his dreams and reality are incompatible. Only at the most superficial level, do we have the story of Jay Gatsby’s romantic love and pursuit of Daisy Buchanan.

Nick has a physical proximity to the main character and he serves as his confident. He can observe the action firsthand. He can collect more details about

¹⁸¹ See TRILLING, Lionel. “F. Scott Fitzgerald” (1945). In: MIZENER, Arthur, ed. *F. Scott Fitzgerald*:

Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1955, p.11-20.

the story he is telling because he follows the characters on their distinct settings. Nick's narrative carries the novel's more abstract concern with idealism. Gatsby "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.105). He creates "the Great Gatsby" from the raw material of his early self, James Gatz, and from a boundless imagination, an embodied spirit capable of anything. When, at last, Gatsby kisses Daisy he believes that he "forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.116). At this moment, Gatsby achieves a mystical sphere, personifying "the son of God". The ideal world to Gatsby shatters in the face of the real one. It has, of course, happened before with Dutch sailors who "for a transitory and enchanted moment" contemplated the "fresh green breast of the new world" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.187). While Gatsby is conceived as the owner of time, Daisy represents a space which already has an owner: her husband Tom. There is the high-class society warning the middle-class fellow that the green land is not free any longer.

Nick provides a parallelism between a metaphysical idealized world projected upon reality. "And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailor's eyes" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.187). In this universe, past, present and future converge simultaneously in the same space. The intricate weaving of the various stories within *The Great Gatsby* is accomplished through a complex symbolic substructure of the narrative. The green light, which carries meaning at every level of the story - as Gatsby's go-ahead sign, as money, as the "green breast of the new world" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.187), as springtime - is strategically placed in chapters one, five, and nine. The eyes of T.J. Eckleburg "dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.29) - which is the wasteland that America has become - and their empty gaze

appears at crucial moments such as when Tom visits his mistress in the Valley of Ashes and before and after her death. The advertisement functions as a reminder that God has been replaced by fading signs of American materialism.

The sustained good driver/bad driver metaphor suggests a parallel between morality and immorality, responsibility and carelessness. It can be observed when Daisy runs over Myrtle and will not stop to accept responsibility. When Jordan Baker -whose name combines two automobile brands from the 1920's - wears her careless driving as a symbol of status, Nick states "I saw that [...] she felt safer on a place where any divergence from a code would be thought impossible. She was incurably dishonest" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p. 64). The women appear as shadows, entities in trouble with the use of machines. They live in a degraded world which lost its link to Nick's high praised conception of morality. By using these motifs, Fitzgerald creates an allegorical correspondence between distinct elements which merge in specific moments. The mentioned characters are used to present contrast in relation to the idealism in which the great Gatsby is described.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The allegorical object, however can only be considered in itself an object worthy of knowledge through a visual image, which contains a mystic element. At the same time, the image is a ruin that holds imperfection, it is a fragment. "The artist imprints the meaning in the image and it becomes an emblem of the knowledge he venerates" (BENJAMIN,1977, p.206). For Walter Benjamin, each object is a fragment – a ruin- whose totality is lost forever in the past. The art of fragmentation examines alienation, solitude, anxiety and

isolation, and its reaction is a profound feeling of melancholy¹⁸². When Nick expresses Gatsby's feeling about the meaning of the "green light on Daisy's dock" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p. 100), he says: "Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever [...] Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects has diminished by one" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.100). When the woman who stands for the object- the light- is achieved, the object loses its metaphysical power to represent something else. According to Benjamin, in this process of desacralization, the sublime appears, a sublime that, due to exaggeration, becomes the grotesque¹⁸³. It was expressed in Baroque times and revived in Modernity. Nick, analyzing Daisy's behavior, concludes: "how grotesque thing a rose could be" (FITZGERALD, 1925, p.186).

When she also loses her seductive power, she stands for a white daisy with a corrupted yellow center. The representation of hope, which was once associated to the green light, ends up demystified by its link to money and to high-class possessions. In the same sense, the "green breast of the new world", which was once associated to the American land, ends up reduced to a "voice full of money". These distinct elements are momentarily linked on Daisy's image. She is not a person, but Gatsby's object of desire elected to add aura to his material possessions. But, according to Nick, she is a failure in this aspect. She is only a dream, a wish disconnected to reality.

There is the impossibility of disconnection between contradictions within the allegorical field. In this sense, women are represented as necessary, but destructive. The fragment is then the most important element because it is

¹⁸² Melancholy is understood as a historical attitude with which the allegorist contemplates both the sacred and the mundane world at the same time. The only pleasure the melancholic permits himself is allegory (BENJAMIN, 1977, p. 207).

¹⁸³ The term grotesque means the "underground phantasmagoria, the occult and spectral substratum, which the allegory codifies in its profound spheres of significance" (BENJAMIN, 1977, p.200).

not occult. Daisy's holy image is described as a fragment, an empty cover with no substance. The fragment assumes huge proportions, mainly because of its capacity to point to something different. An individual character stands for a national experience, and sensations of pity and redemption are carried in favor of Gatsby. The dialect doctrine of allegory points to ambiguity as its main quality. In the process of allegorical reading, the method is digression. Each layer of significance brings the opportunity to decipher another one.

Gatsby can be recognized as a personification of the modern ideal, from a male point of view. In a patriarchal context, he did not achieve his ideal because he wanted more from a woman, and from a country, than she or it could provide. He wished to own a place of substance, consistency, security because he believed himself the owner of time. He ends up being nowhere and everywhere, as an image which loses substance. What remains is the reader's wish of Gatsby's eternal return to a garden of Eden "above the trees", a recurrent motif in many artistic works.

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