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Title of the proposed research:

Literature, Money and the Anxiety of Authorship in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

Introduction

Scott F. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has received the attention of a huge number of critics. To date, its thematic and formal aspects have been explored from so many analytic perspectives amassing in the process such a daunting volume of critical literature for new readers who wish to carve a new research space. However, notwithstanding the intimidating bulk of literary scholarship already woven around it, *The Great Gatsby* like the Sphinx never ceases to invite, or to use Althusser's word, interpellate the reader to try to solve its hidden mysteries. This research responds to this interpellation by exploring the numismatic dimension of the novel with reference to Mark Shell's *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval and Modern Era*. This issue of literature and money in its coin and paper forms is central to American literature as the result of the heated debate between the "paper-money" men and the upholders of minted coins that had animated American political life up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Arguably, Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Goldbug" (1843) provides a typical example of this debate in its first stages. Apart from reflecting the debate in American political economy Poe's work expresses the anxiety of authorship, that is how to authorize a piece of literature and turn it into gold as if by an authorizing act of Congress. In the discussion that follows, I would argue that Fitzgerald and his character narrator Carraway suffer from the same anxiety of authorship as Poe and William Le Grand in "The Goldbug" in their attempts to assume literary authority and in their search for a high financial return on investment in fiction writing. Carraway's initial job as an apprentice bondsman in New York and his association with the mythical figure of Midas and other such strewn hints in Fitzgerald's novel largely account for my concern with the issue of money and literature in relation to the

anxiety of authorship and its shaping influence on the character narrator's problematical attitude as regards social bonds, friendship, love, honesty, family relationships and so on.

Results and discussion

"For millions of characters American small town means *home* – a place where we are loved for what we always were, not for what we have become; a place, as Robert Frost said, where when you go there they have to take you in; in the *unum* amid the chaotic *pluribus*. Grown men and women secretly harbor a nostalgia for a home place, even though they once thought it suffocating and conformist and lacking in opportunity (Lingeman Richard, 1995:103).

Lingeman's quote above summarizes well the motivation of Carraway's departure and return to Louisville, Minnesota after his short stay in New York as an apprentice bondsman. He tells us at the beginning that he felt restless in his hometown after his return to the war, a restlessness that eventually led him to New York in hope of becoming a stockbroker. Post-War New York has unleashed a type of gold rush similar to the one that California and later Nebraska had triggered in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. We remember that he "bought a dozen volumes on banking and credit and investment securities, and they stood on my shelf in red and gold like New Money from the mint, promising to unfold the shining secrets that only Midas and Morgan and Maecenas knew" (p.10). What is remarkable in this citation is the parallel that Carraway establishes between the books and banknotes. This parallel makes me think of the analogy that theorists of literature such as Mark Shell have made between money and literature, or money and aesthetic theory. The paper money debate between the "paper money men" as the advocates of paper money

and the gold bugs as the advocate of gold, in opposition to paper money were called in the mid-nineteenth century could not dwell on in this research.

The reading of Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Goldbug* (1843) summarizes it well for us men of letters. The *Goldbug* recounts how a certain Le Grand (Great like Great Gatsby) an impoverished Southern aristocrat uses his intellect to decipher a paper and thus find gold, an allegory in the form of Poe's wish-fulfillment of turning his writings into money at the very time that financiers (the paper money men) as some sorts of alchemists were turning paper into gold with a monetary symbolization crediting it as such by institutional authorities such as Congress. As Marc Shell writes it so well, "In America, comparisons were made between the way a mere shadow or piece of paper becomes money credited as substantial money and the way an artistic appearance is taken for the real thing by a willing suspension of disbelief. Congress, it was said, could turn paper into gold by "act of Congress that made it money. Why could not an artist turn paper with a design or story on it into gold" (Shell Marc 1993: 6). I would argue that Carraway belies himself as a paper money man by associating literature with money. His obsession shows the linking of his name with the three "Ms" standing for money, the legendary King Midas with his golden touch, J.P. Morgan with his *Gospel of Wealth*, and Maecenas whose French name "Mécène" means patron of the arts because of his support of artists and writers with his colossal fortune.

I would argue that throughout the novel, Carraway is an interested character. Allegorically speaking he went to New York City not only with the expectation into the bonds business but also in search of a character for a fiction in order to become an author with the possibility to cash on his experiences on his return to Louisville. We remember that when he is first asked by Tom to which broker he is attached,

Carraway mentions a name that is not identified by Tom, who is himself a broker. We understand here that his first business is to make money in whatever ways, he can. What is remarkable about this Carraway is that he starts as a character-narrator but as the story goes on he gradually assumes the role of author by the adoption of the third-person point of view, or what modernists call the free indirect speech. I have already pointed out that throughout the novel a huge number of characters are shown in the process of reading, usually what is called low-brow literature. However, at the same time, we have Carraway intervening in the narrative with comments of his on the progression of the story. This interest in writing makes the novel an introspective or self-reflexive novel, but at the same I note what recent literary scholarship calls the anxiety of authorship, authorship being then a field of contention between the low-brow literature referred to extensively in the novel, and the novel in the process of being written itself decisively placed in the high-brow or classic literature.

In reading *The Great Gatsby* from Carraway's interested point of view as a bondsman or paper money men, a play by Luigi Pirandello entitled *Six Characters in Search of an Author* comes to my mind. The six characters in question are characters conceived and then abandoned by their author, only to intrude on the stage to demand that their story to be performed. The play interrogates the relationship between author and characters on the one hand and the characters among themselves on the other. Pirandello's play is invoked here to point out the reversal of the situation, because in this particular case it is the first person character-narrator who wants to usurp the place of the author. As an allegory of writing, we see Carraway pushed out, browbeaten by characters like Tom, acting as a pimp for Gatsby, enjoying himself as a voyeur, and watching over the family brawls in Myrtle's

private apartment, and in Tom's home, spying or eavesdropping on what people say about the central character, making friends with Gatsby just to delve further down into his secrets, making notes on draft papers, and calendars, all of these in the hope of having enough material to write a novel.

In the third chapter, he tells us that "Reading over what I have written so far, I see I have given the impression that the events of three nights several weeks apart were all that observed me. (p.62)" And for him to add as in disavowal of being interested in writing a novel, "that most of the time I worked. In the early morning the sun threw my shadow westward as I hurried down the white chasms of lower New York to the Probity Trust. I knew the other clerks and young bond-salesmen by their first names, and lunched with them in dark crowded restaurants on little pig sausages and mashed potatoes and coffee. (p. 62)" As I read these lines, D.H. Lawrence's critical say "believe the tale not the author" comes to mind because Carrway's aside and the ironical reference to Probity Trust show that he is lying through his teeth because we do not find more than two references in his novel to his work as a bond salesman, and then only to make jottings of events and people involving the other characters in the novel. It follows that in spite of calling himself the most honest man around the globe, in the last analysis, he reveals himself as what Melville calls a confidence man, looking for an opportunity to make money through the writing a novel about the Great Gatsby. The bond of friendship that he weaves with the main character at the end is not dis-interested, it is a counterfeit to extract the last piece of information from Gatsby to wrap up his novel. His moral sentiment of gratitude expressed to Great Gatsby at the end of the novel rings wrong in the ears of the reader who knows the fraudulent practices of his grandfather, to whom he says he resembles.

The bonds of love that Carraway weaves with women are no less suspicious. For one thing, he dismisses all women as dishonest. For him Jordan Baker is “incurably dishonest. (p.64)” He widens the claim to all women, “dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply. (p.65)” This judgmental attitude is problematic because Carraway is the man who has broken the hearts of many more women than any other character in the novel. For one thing, he left his first flame in Louisville preferring instead to participate in the 1920s New York “Gold rush” in the form of speculation in the New York City Stock exchange. In chapter Three, he also avows that he “even a short affair with a girl who live in Jersey City and worked in the accounting department, but her brother began throwing mean looks in my direction, so whe she went on her vacation in July I let it blow quietly away. (p.63)” The third and last woman with whom he seems to have woven a bond is Jordan. He flirts twice with at the back of Tom’s blue Coupé and during one of Gatsby’s party, but he considers as being dishonest, and “jerky” in her attitudes. In the end, he simply forgets about her. In this respect, Carraway is a counterfeit of a man, unable to perform his masculinity in an appropriate, and thus be involved in a love courtship. So he contents himself with watching other males in their erotic relationships.

I shall close this discussion of social bonds in the novel by adding that perhaps the best metaphor that captures the relationship between people in *The Great Gatsby* is that of counterfeiting. The book recalls in many ways Andre Gide’s *The Counterfeiters* by the huge number of character who lie to each other, who cheat in professional games, who cheat on each other in adulterous relationships, in developing false identities, and who make their fortunes through bootlegging in the name of the American dream. It is true that we show as many faces to as many people we meet, but in the case the characters try to escape of other characters in

order not to divulge their counterfeit attitudes. The most blatant counterfeit is arguably Carraway who sets out on a gold rush to New York, but comes back not with ingots but draft book about the dissolution of social bonds.

The car is perhaps the one symbol in the book which reveals to us the disorientation of the community and the dissolution of its social bonds. The wreck scene in the third chapter of the novel after Gatsby's party puts in a nutshell this social disorientation. As Carraway recounts this wreck emphasizing through the character Owl Eyes who avows his total ignore of mechanics, read the social mechanics of time, when asked by a man in the crowd how the Coupé found itself in the ditch with one of its wheels off. When the driver described as a pale, dangling individual steps out of the car, the first question he asks is whether the car has "run outa gas. (p.61)" Even when the whole matter is explained to him, instead of proposing to dragging the car to the nearest mechanic, the sole words that came out of his mouth are: "Wonder'ff tell me where there's a gas'line station. (p.62)" At their persistent reminders that the wheel is off, he proposes another incongruous solution "Back out,' he suggested after a moment, "Put her in reverse. (p.62)" Commenting on this incongruous situation, Norman H. Hostetler comes out with this remark: "The wheel is off, nobody is in control, the system is out of order, and the only solutions proposed are irrelevant and characteristically American – the nostalgic one of put (sic) it in reverse, and the violent one of giving it more gas. (Hostetler Norman H, 1990: 114)"

The metaphor of car as an expression of social tensions and social disorientation is also a synecdoche since it also concerns those who drive them. In this respect, all the drivers, especially the females, are described as careless drivers. For example, Carraway is shocked at the careless way Jordan Baker. Carraway is also a driver, but he is true to his name that sounds as "care-way." Jordan Baker has "passed so

close to some workmen that our fender flicked a button on one man's coat. (65)" This incident triggers a conversation about driving a car. At Carraway's protest, "you're a rotten driver. ... Either you ought to be more careful, or you oughtn't to drive at all, (p.65)" Jordan at first denies that she is a bad driver and then turns the argument around when she is contradicting by insisting " that they will keep out of my way, ... it takes two to make an accident. (p.65)" It has to be noted that it is careless driving this time by Daisy who runs over Myrtle, which turns the romance into a tragedy. From the beginning we know that Daisy is a careless driver because when she renews contact with Gatsby she arrives at Carraway's home in a large open car "under the dripping bare lilac-trees, which symbolically speaks are associated with death.

Conclusion

It follows from the above discussion that Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* inscribes itself in an American literary tradition going back to Poe's writings such as *The Goldbug* in its association of money with literature. This numismatic topic having its origins in the American government nineteenth-century decision to authoritatively circulate money in its paper form is linked to the question of the authority of writers to do the same with regard to the circulation of their writings in a capitalist economy. However, around what I have called the anxiety of authorship, that is the anxiety of being recognized as author in the literature market, *The Great Gatsby* develops a constellation of issues related to the truthfulness in social bonds of all sorts, friendship, love, commercial exchanges, relations of rural and urban communities and so on.

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