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“Social Reality Versus Ontological Reality: The Differing Sense of Reality in *The Great Gatsby* and *Heart of Darkness*”

Zeynep Yılmaz KURT*

Abstract

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* is discussed widely for being influenced by Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. This article refers to the relevance of Conradian influences and the parallels between these two novels in terms of narration techniques, plot and characterization. Despite these parallels, however, it is also argued that the two novels reflect reality on different dimensions. It concludes by stating that Fitzgerald shares the same concern with Conrad in narration technique, in characterization and in handling the idea of corruption and civilisation, but their approach to the subject of corruption and civilisation differs. Fitzgerald considers corruption as a social vice, whereas, in Conrad it is associated with human nature altogether. These differing ideas of corruption, as an ontological fact in Conrad and as a social vice in Fitzgerald, prove also that their concept of reality is different.

Key Words: 20th century novel, Conrad, Fitzgerald, corruption, reality

Özet

F. Scott Fitzgerald’ın *The Great Gatsby* adlı romanında, Conrad’ın özellikle *Heart of Darkness* adlı romanında kullandığı teknikten etkilendiği pek çok eleştirmen tarafından dile getirilmiştir. Bu makale, özellikle anlatım teknikleri, kurgu ve karakter çizimi yönünden iki roman arasındaki benzerlikleri vurgular. Bu benzerliklere rağmen, iki romanın farklı gerçeklikleri yansıttığı da ileri sürülmüştür. Sonuç olarak,

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anlatım tekniği, karakter çizimi ve yozlaşma - medeniyet kavramlarının ele alınması konusunda Fitzgerald'ın Conrad'a benzediği, ancak konuya yaklaşımlarının çok farklı olduğu vurgulanmıştır. Fitzgerald yozlaşmayı sosyal bir bozulma olarak ele alırken Conrad bunu tamamen insan doğasıyla ilişkilendirmiştir. Conrad'da insanın yapısı, Fitzgerald'da sosyal bozulma ile ilişkilendirilen yozlaşma kavramına bu farklı yaklaşımlar iki romandaki gerçeklik kavramlarının da farklı olduğunu gösterir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yirminci yüzyıl romanı, Conrad, Fitzgerald, yozlaşma, gerçeklik kavramı

F. Scott Fitzgerald produced his first novel of great importance, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), about two decades after Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Fitzgerald criticism, since the beginning, has been concerned with tracing the Conradian influences in *The Great Gatsby* especially in comparison with *Heart of Darkness*. The central concern for many critics, in their comparison, has been the parallels in character development, the main characters as well as the narrators. Kurtz and Gatsby are claimed, for instance, to be mythical characters, who are presented in a "fabulous" atmosphere with "surrealistic" qualities¹ (quoted in Barzun, 1985: 34). In other words, *The Great Gatsby* is written in "the tradition of Conrad's Marlow stories" (Lehan, 1990: 31,29). Harold Bloom concludes his comparison, in fact, by asserting that Fitzgerald adopts "the fictive mode of Conrad" to *The Great Gatsby* especially with regard to the use of a first person narrator/commentator on the main characters and events (1). The scope of Conrad's influence on Fitzgerald is extended as far as to include such similarities as "themes and plot situations, ambivalence of symbolism", the ideas of "spiritual cannibalism" and "the isolated hero"² (Stallman, 1991: 448, 450).

The characters and events portrayed in these two books, in fact, share many common points in personal, social and historical context. Marlow's story, focusing on Kurtz as the main character, reflects the spoil of Africa at a time when Britain was at the height of its imperial expansion. *Heart of Darkness* is set in the closing years of the 19th century when not only England but all the European countries were pursuing new domains for material benefit. 19th century Britain is marked by "its growing prosperity, the vigor of its people, and the expansion of its economy . . . [many] Britons left their island home to conquer and populate new worlds." (Wesseling, 1996: 31) Despite the differing motives in going to Africa, the general claim of the European was that of "civilizing" the natives of these places (Killingray, 1973:48). "With few exceptions European[s] . . . regarded Africans as an inferior race of people living a degraded way of life in a dark continent . . . [and European values] should in the name of 'civilization' and 'progress' be imposed on Africans by force if necessary" (Killingray, 1973:66). The hypocritical attitude of Europeans in hiding their real motive of material gain in going to Africa constitutes, in fact, the basic ground for Conrad³.

Nick's story, similarly, tells about Gatsby's destruction by the Jazz Age opportunism of 1920s New York. Cashman defines this period as a "decade of affluence with increased consumer spending on such durable items as automobiles and domestic appliances", but a time marked, at the same time, by poverty of most Americans (186). Thus, "[t]he 1920s were golden only for a privileged few" (Cashman, 1998:186). The imbalanced division of finance led many to take advantage of the prohibition of alcohol in 1919. The prohibition law was highly abused in 1920s. "[P]rohibition afforded innumerable opportunities for tax-free free enterprise to soak up excess capital with the implicit connivance of government. It provided literally millions of people with additional employment . . . including law-enforcement officers" (Cashman, 1998: 210). This gave way to many gangs who were dealing with illegal supply of alcohol, by bribing the police and authorities (Cashman, 1998:211). Gatsby's story is set during this decade of social corruption which is associated with wealth and prosperity on one hand, gangs and illegal commitments on the other⁴.

In both novels, however, the main character is led to destruction, paradoxically, as a consequence of his personal idealism, which clashes with the corrupt values of the society in which he lives. In both novels, again, the events occur in a period which is abundant with new opportunities for material gain, thus more liable to corruption than normal times. This paper argues that even though Fitzgerald was deeply influenced by Conrad's ideas, in dealing with social corruption as the source of individual perversity, his work differs from Conrad's. He handles corruption as a social vice limited to a certain time and place whereas for Conrad corruption is not limited to a certain society and its members, but to humankind as a whole. In their approach to corruption, thus, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby* differ highly and the context through which they express themselves reflects different dimensions of reality.

Consequently, the context of reality that Conrad recreates in *Heart of Darkness* in presenting the opposition of civilisation and nature as the source of personal corruption, penetrates deeper than Fitzgerald's, who considers human vice within the limited context of western civilization.

In an autobiographical study of *The Great Gatsby*, Lehan quotes Fitzgerald as having stated, in a letter, that, "I want to write something new" (28). This "radical departure," Lehan suggests, is towards a tradition the principles of which are set down, in the preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus* by Joseph Conrad (28). The most favored idea of Conrad by Fitzgerald is especially the definition of the artist as one who deals with universal human traits:

[The artist] speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain . . . and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear which binds man to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living the living to the unborn. (Conrad, 1942: 28)

Fitzgerald deals also with universal human traits and feelings that prevail everywhere and in every age, in terms of character as well as themes. Moreover, Fitzgerald follows Conrad's example in *The Great Gatsby* very closely in using a similar pattern of narration, similar character development and similar plots. *Event hough* this paper aims at displaying the essential difference in the two writers' sense of reality, the similarities between *The Great Gatsby* and *Heart of Darkness* will be argued first, for difference lies, in fact, in similarities. The two novels will be compared in terms of the main characters, the narrators and the social and historical contexts, to help clarify the differing sense of reality in two novels.

Kurtz and Gatsby can be compared for being presented as corrupt characters at the beginning, but later redeemed for having been the victims of the corrupt society in which they live. Comparing the main characters, Kurtz and Gatsby, in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby*, Lehan claims that both are characters "who lived or felt with an intensity that separated [them]. . . from others" (29). They both are presented, as corrupt characters, at the beginning, as foils against the civilized society. As the novel proceeds, however, it is proved that the materialism and hypocrisy of their societies itself are the main causes of their corruption.

In *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz is presented throughout most of the novel as a name who appears only just before his death at the end of the novel. The gradual exposition of Kurtz, as the man in charge of a very important trading post "in the true ivory country," sending out of the jungle lots of the best sort of ivory, ends up in exposition of his capacity for extreme cruelty. Kurtz is depicted as a savage who is capable of extreme violence that terrifies even Kurtz himself who sums up his experience with Africa as, "The horror! The horror!" in the end (Conrad, 1994:100). The horrific fact that Kurtz realizes through Africa is his own internal capacity for cruelty and violence towards fellow human beings. In his first appearance in the novel Kurtz is identified, even physically, with violence and greed. Despite his sickness Kurtz's greed for ivory is not quenched yet. While being carried on a stretcher out of the jungle, he opens "his

mouth wide . . . as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the man before him.” (Conrad, 1994: 86) He uses gun power against natives during the expeditions taken to the depths of the country for ivory. His attraction to ivory leads him beyond the limits of not only civilization but humanity as well. So overwhelmed by his ambition for ivory and power, Kurtz does not want to leave the jungle, even though he is exhausted physically. Going down the river on the steamer, he still cries out at the invisible wilderness as, “Oh, but I will wring your heart yet” (Conrad, 1994:98).

What makes Kurtz’s violence even more horrific is his European background, which has educated him as an ideal intellectual. Kurtz is an intellectual, an artist, a painter, a poet, a musician, a journalist, a politician – in short “a universal genius”. He is sent to Africa by the “International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs” to make a report for their future guidance (Conrad, 1994:71,103). In the wilderness, however, he is transformed into a primitive who is even more savage than the natives, from whom he takes their ivory by force and consents to their taking him for a deity to whom they sacrifice human bodies.

Fitzgerald proves Conradian influence in his presentation of Jay Gatsby as Kurtz’s counterpart in *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby first appears as a name, a “contemporary legend” as the host of “hilarious” and extravagant parties abundant with food, drink, singing and dancing. Speculations over the source of his wealth, which is not inherited, associate him with gangsters, murdering and bootlegging (Fitzgerald, 2001: 62). The constant phone calls from Chicago and his only friend Mr. Wolfheim, for example, who wears “cuff buttons of human molar,” and who is reputed for his illegal commitments, ally Gatsby with gangsters and the underworld (Fitzgerald, 2001: 46,47). Details of Gatsby’s former life, in fact, prove that he was a naive young American who fell in love with upper class Daisy. Then, he dedicates his years to improving himself to match Daisy’s social status - albeit in illegal ways. Gatsby becomes corrupt through the love he feels for Daisy.

In his article discussing *The Great Gatsby* as mirroring the Jazz Age and Gatsby’s tragedy as the end of American Dream, the critic Robert Ornstein claims that the novel reflects the “betrayal of the naive American dream in a corrupt society” (Fitzgerald,2001: 240). Corruption is associated with society rather than with Gatsby individually. Gatsby, in fact, is an idealist who is distinguished from the rest of the members of his society through his capacity for strong love and dedication. His involvement with the underworld, and all his extravagant parties in his grand mansion

aim at a re-contact with Daisy, who acquires an almost sacred meaning for Gatsby. In other words, the illegal money that he had been after was, “a means [to achieve Daisy] rather than an end” for Gatsby. (Donaldson, 1984: 27). He needs money, he believes, to achieve the woman he loves.

Alongside being depicted as a man of illegal commitments on the surface, Gatsby is presented, even at the beginning, as a decent person capable of suffering for his love. He is presented, for example, for the first time in the novel, watching the “green light” at the end of the dock of Buchanans’ mansion, where Daisy lives. He is described in a trance-like mood, “stretch[ing] out his arms towards the dark water in a curious way . . . [and] trembling . . . [towards] a single green light, minute and far away . . .” (Fitzgerald, 2001: 16). His ideal love for Daisy and his belief in material success for her sake are gradually replaced by disappointment as he realizes Daisy’s superficiality. “His count of enchanted objects had diminished” (Fitzgerald, 2001: 61). For Matterson, “Gatsby’s hope and belief in promise makes him somehow the embodiment of the abstract values of the American Dream . . .” (29). His values, however, clash with those of Jazz Age society, which is materialistic in essence. Just like Kurtz, the only reason that Gatsby wants money is to achieve some spiritual goal. In the end, however, not only Gatsby’s dream but his life is also shattered through Daisy and her husband Tom, when he is killed in consequence of Daisy’s fault.

What identifies *Heart of Darkness* with *The Great Gatsby*, a critic argues, is “the juxtaposing of the imagination of an ‘isolate’ hero and the ethos of a particular society . . .” (Long, 1991: 474). In other words, both Conrad and Fitzgerald suggest similar themes in presenting first “the drama of a spiritually alienated hero,” then “the gradual exposure of a society” with which the hero is in opposition (Long, 1991: 474). Kurtz’s and Gatsby’s isolated lives, for being extremely corrupt characters, constitute, on the surface, the main focus in both novels. Underneath, however, it is possible to distinguish the norms of their societies which lead both Kurtz and Gatsby to this extreme of corruption. Measured against the corruption of institutions and other members of their societies, Kurtz and Gatsby are redeemed. Moreover, they are proved even to be idealistic characters as opposed to hypocrisy prevailing in their societies.

Narrators who function in both novels, in fact, as balancing forces between protagonists and their societies are critical of protagonists at the beginning, but later both come to realise that society itself is the real source of their corruption. Kurtz and Gatsby are only individual victims of this corruption. After witnessing what this corrupt society did to Gatsby, Nick, for example, confesses that he lost his tolerance towards people: “[O]nly Gatsby . . . was exempt from my reaction – Gatsby, who represented

[at the beginning] everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (Fitzgerald, 2001:3) Nick realizes that whatever vice Gatsby possesses is the reflection of the corruption in society as a whole. Marlow was similarly attracted to Kurtz in the end, in comparison to other Europeans in Africa. Marlow approves Kurtz in this sense as he was “man enough” to admit his primitive self. Kurtz, Marlow believes, was under a spell, “the heavy, mute spell of wilderness – that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions” (Conrad, 1994:95). Kurtz, he believes, is honest enough to admit the primitive within himself, as opposed to hypocritical Europeans trying to veil their materialism and corruption in their pretence at civilization. “Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it . . . I understand better the meaning of his stare [which] was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness” (Conrad, 1994:101). Kurtz is honest enough, for Marlow to face the primitive within himself.

In *Heart of Darkness* all Europeans in Africa, as well as at home, are materialists. The corrupt Kurtz, in this sense, embodies whole Europe: “he had been educated partly in England . . . His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (Conrad, 1994:71). Though Europeans try to disguise their real purpose, even the most educated and intellectual ones are after profit. As the narrator gets deeper into the continent, the more he becomes exposed to the hypocrisy and corruption of Europeans, pretending to be in Africa for humanistic purposes. The outer station, which is defined as a “landscape of man-made destitution and misery”, provides instances of the European’s cruel treatment of natives; and Europeans here are defined as, “a distorted form of humanity” for their cruelty (Raval, 1986:25). The first thing that the narrator witnesses as soon as he arrives there is, “people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants”, and chained to each other while working (Conrad, 1994:22). Those who are unable to work are left in a grove, which Marlow calls an “Inferno”, a place where the sick blacks are “withdrawn to die – dying slowly” (Conrad, 1994:24).

They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast . . . lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. (Conrad, 1994:24)

This dehumanized picture of natives in Africa contradicts with Europeans' humanistic claims at civilizing them. The European hypocrisy becomes more obvious in their attitude in the inner parts of the continent. The outer station represents Europeans' corruption through their cruelty to natives, in the inner station, however, Marlow witnesses their moral corruption as doubled through their plotting even against each other. Agents, or "pilgrims" as the narrator calls them, are, for example, struggling with each other for material gain through ivory:

... they all were waiting – all the sixteen or twenty of pilgrims of them – for something ... though the only thing that ever came to them was disease as far as I could see. They beguiled the time by backbiting and intriguing against each other in a foolish kind of way. There was an air of plotting about that station, ... It was as unreal as everything else ... The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account – but as to effectually lifting a finger – oh, no. (Conrad, 1994:35)

The manager and his brick maker ally, in *Heart of Darkness*, for example, are the individual representatives of the extreme hypocrisy and corruption of Europeans in Africa. "Papier mache Mephistopheles,"⁵ says the narrator, for the brick maker. He is perverted morally, Marlowe believes: "... it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my fore finger through him, I would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, may be" (Conrad, 1994:37).

The only quality through which the manager gets his position in the company is his physical strength to survive the hard climate of Africa. The manager, in reality, hates Kurtz as a potential threat to his own position in the company, because he sends out the best ivory from the depths of the jungle, and has connections in the headquarters of the company in Europe. The manager fears that some day Kurtz might replace him in the company (Conrad, 1994:36-38). He behaves hypocritically by pretending to be worried about Kurtz's life, who is sick deep in the jungle. Once released from the rational and ethical social order in Europe, the only thing that counts for Europeans, Panagopoulos argues, is "self preservation and profit" (74). Thus, "[T]he jungles of Congo can be seen as a metaphor for a society where men have been reduced to beasts" (Panagopoulos, 1998:74). The manager's uncle reveals a good instance of corruption in the absence of social and legal restrictions when he says that: "get him [Kurtz] hanged! Why not? Anything can be done in this country. ... nobody here, you understand, *here*, can endanger your position" (Conrad, 1994:46). Marlow suspects even that the sinking of the steamer was an act of conspiracy committed against Kurtz by the manager.

Because, just two days before the arrival of Marlow to captain the steamer, it sinks in the consequence of the manager's attempt to make it go up the river. The only thing Marlow needs to mend it is rivets, of which there were many in the outer station. No rivets arrive, however, even though there are carriages going out there few times a week. And it is too late for Kurtz when they finally manage to mend the steamer and go up the river to save him.

Not only the agents of the company but all Europeans in Africa, a group calling themselves "Eldorado Exploring Expedition", headed by the manager's uncle, for example, have no other aim than raiding the country under the pretence of exploration. They are there, "to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land . . . with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe" (Conrad, 1994:44).

R. E. Long believes that, "[I]n their unusual careers Kurtz and Gatsby became critics of their times; for if their imaginations take them 'out of bounds,' and they are defeated, they nevertheless reveal the greater failure of their societies." which, he believes again, are marked with "meanness and materialism" as well as "sterility and spiritual depletion" (481). Corrupt and materialist Europeans in Africa are only individual representatives of European civilization. Kurtz's "intended" reveals that "her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved of by her people. He wasn't rich enough or something" (Conrad, 1994:108). The materialist society back in Europe, thus, seems to be the main cause that, "drove . . . [Kurtz] out there", and forced an intellectual like him to become a greedy monster (Conrad, 1994:108). The same European society behaves hypocritically, on the other hand, by disguising their materialism with idealism in employing such institutions as "Organization for the Suppression of Savage Customs" and considering Africans as the savages to be civilized by them. Even an intellectual like Kurtz, who went there for idealistic purposes, cannot resist the temptation. The material benefit that they gain from ivory reduces all the principles of civilization to nothing, and exposes the primitive all human beings bear in their nature. The primitive that Europeans disguise under their civilized manners is even more degrading (for it is accompanied by hypocrisy) than that of natives, whom they consider as savages. While discussing these two novels, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby*, Long refers to another common aspect by suggesting that though heroes are presented in the foreground, the central focus, in both novels, is on their societies. He claims that, "The interest of the two novels has centered steadily upon the heroes until the end, and then it suddenly shifts to the reality underlying contemporary life which the heroes' careers have illuminated." (481) The center shifts, in other words, from corruption of Kurtz to that of whole Europe, and from corruption of Gatsby to that of Jazz Age America.

Gatsby who constitutes, in *The Great Gatsby*, the central concern as a corrupt character at the beginning, is replaced gradually by the members of the society who exceed him in corruption. This society consists of shallow characters whose only concern is to entertain themselves with food, dance and gossip about the host whom they don't know at all. Tom and Daisy Buchanan are, in this sense, individual representatives of this society through their shallowness, corruption, insincerity - even in their marital relationship and in their prejudiced attitude towards those who are not, especially, from the same social class with themselves. Tom is identified with his infidelity to his wife since the very beginning of their marriage, Daisy is, similarly, defined as "insincere" and "artificial". She is cruel in behaving selfishly towards Gatsby who dedicates years of his life to attain her favor and who is ready to, and does sacrifice his life for her in the end. Daisy, in return, "conspires" against Gatsby together with her husband (Fitzgerald, 2001:13,15,55,93). For Nick, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy- they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made" (Fitzgerald, 2001:114). They disguise their corruption with their social status.

As the representative of aristocracy, "old money", Tom has an intense contempt for Gatsby and people like him. He defines "A lot of these newly rich people", as "just big bootleggers . . ." (Fitzgerald, 2001:69) Moreover, as the representative of "Nordic race" Tom extends his discriminating attitude to the racial sphere, under the guise of civilization. For him civilization means domination over others who are different from them. Tom discusses the idea of civilization, which he suggests is in danger, as follows:

Civilization's going to pieces, . . . The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be - utterly submerged . . . This idea is that we're Nordics. I am, and you are, and you are, . . . - And we've produced all the things that go to make civilization - oh, science and art and all that . . . (Fitzgerald, 2001:10-11)

Through this discourse of civilization Tom extends his egoism beyond the personal and social sphere into the racial. This idea is corrupt in itself. Considered from this perspective, civilization, for people like Tom, and Daisy who shares Tom's excitement by saying "We've got to beat them down", is nothing more than a means to disguise their egotism as well as social and moral depravity (Fitzgerald, 2001:10). Measured

against this corruption Gatsby is bound to lose, “. . . once he ends up playing Tom’s game” (Lehan, 1992:47). In other words, though an “outlaw” Gatsby is honest in, “. . . his fidelity to an idea, his faith in the power of dream . . .” and this is what redeems Gatsby in the end (Stallman, 1991:450).

The two writers, Fitzgerald and Conrad, do a similar thing: Fitzgerald criticizes the hypocritical attitude of Jazz Age society, the members of which disguise their corruption by pretending to be civilized; Conrad reflects the hypocritical attitude of greedy Europeans who claim to be in Africa to civilize its natives. Moreover, they follow the same pattern in employing first person narrators who function as balancing forces between the main characters and their societies. Despite all these similarities in subject matter and narrative structures, however, the two novels differ in essence for they deal with different aspects of human consciousness, thus different levels of reality. The narrators, Marlowe in *Heart of Darkness* and Nick Caraway in *The Great Gatsby*, who, Long argues, “As the result of their meetings with the heroes . . . arrive at a new understanding . . .” are main agents in determining this difference (481). Narrators’ intermediary status between main characters and their societies, in both novels, helps, at the same time, to expose Conrad’s and Fitzgerald’s perception of reality. There is a parallel between the two authors, Roulston believes, in character drawal and plot organization, but “Fitzgerald’s sensibility and values differed enormously from Conrad’s . . . [and] despite its Conradian gestures *The Great Gatsby* is not fundamentally an exercise in Conradian moralizing” (61,62). The two writers differ in their approach to reality. Nick and Marlow, in this sense, are important, first in their similarity in identifying with Gatsby and Kurtz, and in indicating to the society as the real source of their corruption, secondly by reflecting in this process, authors’ differing concepts of reality also.

While discussing Conrad’s extreme influence on Fitzgerald, Stallman refers to the final pose of narrators as, “Marlow sitting on board the Nelly ‘in the pose of a meditating Buddha!’” in comparison to Nick sitting and “. . . brooding on the old and unknown world . . .” in the end of his story. Stallman considers both narrators as capable of philosophical contemplation (450). Lehan also reveals both narrator’s wisdom when he suggests that each narrator, in these novels, “. . . was trying to make sense out of such monomania and to draw a moral lesson from it that might have application . . . to his own sense of life” (29). Yet, narrators’ capacity for contemplation is limited to the author’s sense of reality.

When compared to Marlow, Nick’s sense of corruption is limited to the society with which he becomes acquainted in the East. “After Gatsby’s death the East was haunted

for me like that, distorted beyond my eye's power of correctionSo, when the blue smoke of brittle leaves was in the air and wind blew the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back to home" (Fitzgerald, 2001:112-113). Thus, Nick's voyage to the West embodies a mood of escapism as well as some sense of romanticism. He imagines the West through the uncorrupt perception of a child, the West of his childhood and youth memories, the memories of early homecomings -

That's my Middle West – not the wheat or prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark . . . I am part of that, a little solemn with the feel of those long winters, a little complacent from growing up in the Caraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. (Fitzgerald, 2001:112)

He retires back into a West which is domestic and warm in his imagination. Nick's decision to go back to West is, "a journey back towards an innocence and security now lost, toward something of himself that has vanished. His west is a memory of childhood" (Lynn, 1991:187). In Nick's reality there is still an ideal as opposed to the corruption he witnesses in the East, he never loses his belief in the familiar "old warm world" (Fitzgerald, 2001:103).

Nick's consciousness localizes corruption and hypocrisy that destroyed Gatsby, to the "East" only, and on a larger scale to America in the 1920s. Ornstein, in this sense, allies *The Great Gatsby* with romanticism when he suggests that it deals with the romantic pursuit of not only its hero but of the book altogether (1991,24). Thus, "Scott Fitzgerald's fable of East and West [in *The Great Gatsby*] . . . mourns eternal lateness of the present hour suspended between the past of romantic memory and the future of romantic promise which ever recedes before us" (245). In Fitzgerald's reality, in other words, there is a touch of romanticism, so the idea of corruption is confined to a certain time and space only.

Conrad differs from Fitzgerald, widely, in associating corruption with human nature as a whole, rather than limiting it to a certain time and place. Sense of reality, in *Heart of Darkness*, is complicated. Conrad claims in the preface to *The Nigger of Narcissus*, that, "The artist . . . seeks the truth . . ." and the work of art, thus, " . . . through its movement, its form, and its color, [should] reveal the substance of its truth – disclose its inspiring secret . . . " (82) What is implied by "truth" here, and exemplified by Marlow's experience with Africa in *Heart of Darkness* is not the truth related with everyday life reality. This is a deeper truth or reality which is at the reach of the wise only. Marlow, in this sense, is distinguished from the other seamen (Conrad, 1994:10). For the ordinary seamen the places they sailed to were, " . . . veiled not by a sense of

mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; . . . But Marlowe was not typical” (Conrad, 1994:8) He is capable of penetrating deeper into the truth which is hidden from the ordinary men. By employing a frame narrator the author distances the inner narrator, Marlow, and the reality he represents from the reader. Marlow looks like an “idol”, a god, “. . . in pose of a Budha preaching in European clothes . . .” (6,10, 111). Marlow’s narration of the story of Kurtz invokes an extraordinary sense of reality. It is a voyage taken to the heart of “truth”, a truth which is difficult to understand even for wise Marlow himself. In other words, *Heart of Darkness* is a novel, Watts suggests, dedicated to answering such ontological questions as “. . . On what does civilization rest?” or “. . . what are the foundations of moral conduct?” (129).

Marlow’s voyage from Europe into jungles of Africa is an initiation, at the same time, to a new sense of reality. Once Marlow starts for Africa, the sense of reality changes, gradually, from its domestic everyday nature. Leaving the familiar European atmosphere behind Marlow says, “For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straight-forward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away” (Conrad, 1994:20). The deeper into Africa they get the more he feels he is being transformed into an almost alien mode of existence. Going up the river, through the huge wilderness of jungle, “. . . made you feel very small, very lost, . . [and] we penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness” (Conrad, 1994:50). The quietness of the wilderness and their voyage through it is extraordinary, “ It was not sleep – it seemed unnatural, like a state of trance” (Conrad, 1994:56). The wilderness appeals to Marlowe with its horrific enigma. They are captured, by fog while going up the river. His senses are blurred by the absurd atmosphere surrounding them:

What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been at the point of dissolving, and a misty strip of water, perhaps two feet broad, around her – and that was all. The rest of the world was nowhere . . . Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind. (Conrad, 1994:57)

The reality that Marlowe realizes in the depths of Africa is so thrilling that it makes his “hair stir” (Conrad, 1994:57). While witnessing the natives on the shore, Marlow becomes even horrified, on seeing human essence naked in “savage Africans” :

. . . unearthly . . . the men were - No, they were not inhuman . . . that was the worst of it – that suspicion of their not being inhuman . . . They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. (Conrad, 1994:51-52)

What separates, in Conrad's opinion, the civilized Europeans from the primitive Africans, a critic believes, is just a matter of time not of essence: Thus, "... Marlow's narrative has throughout been presented in terms of both a journey into the heart of Africa and a journey backwards in time..." (Mongia, 1993:143) Despite all their civilized manners Europeans are of the same essence with savages. Moreover, they are even worse through their hypocritical disclaim of their real nature. Through Marlow, thus, Conrad suggests that, "... the 'primitive' people may in fact be healthier, more vital and better attuned to their environment than are the restless Europeans" (Watts, 1998:61). For being an ideally civilized person, who is reduced into a savage after a very short stay within the jungle, Kurtz proves that "civilization and even humanity might be only skin-deep" (Watts, 1998:90).

Reality for Conrad, as revealed by Cheatham, indicates "the depths of evil to which man may sink", as well as "the heights of morality to which he may rise" (310). The intrigues going on within the station among civilized Europeans represent the evil in human nature. Unable to face this ugly reality Marlow looks away to "... the forest [which] stood up spectrally in the moonlight, ... the silence of the land went home to one's very heart – its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life" (Conrad, 1994:37). Though evil is a part of human existence, civilisation, rather than demeaning it, intensifies it through its hypocrisy. Civilization, Marlow concludes, is nothing more than an illusion, and the primitive do not, at least, own hypocrisy for they are closer to nature.

[T]he man ... must at least be as much of a man as those on the shore.
He must meet that truth with his own true stuff – with his own inborn strength. Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags –rags that would fly off at the first good shake. (Conrad, 1994:52)

Thus, though the main concern in *Heart of Darkness* is with corruption as the evil of civilisation, reality, for Conrad, as revealed through Marlow's experience, is, "the horror at the heart of human existence" (Cheatham, 1986:312). In other words, human nature is liable to evil both in primitive Africans and civilized Europeans.

In conclusion, as revealed by Fitzgerald himself, *The Great Gatsby*, is a novel written under Conradian influence, for following, especially, the same narration pattern as well as characterization techniques and themes with that of *Heart of Darkness*. The first person narrators, Marlow and Nick, are important in the characterization of the main characters who are allied with corruption before narrators know them properly. A European himself, Marlow, who goes to Africa to captain a trading steamer, is attracted at the story of Kurtz who is, as an intellectual European, transformed into a cruel

primitive within the jungle of Africa. Kurtz's story which contributes to the enigma of the continent, occupies Marlow's mind with the desire to achieve the reality beyond the terrible transformation of Kurtz. What he realizes in this process is that not only Kurtz but all Europeans in Africa and those at home are corrupt though they pretend to be civilized. Marlow realizes that, the materialist European society, which is represented by the manager, the brickmaker and almost all the "pilgrims" whose only aim is to spoil Africa, led Kurtz into the depths of Africa. Kurtz, in comparison to those Europeans in Africa, who disguise their greed, pretending to be there to help natives by civilizing them, and those at home, who favor material welfare beyond all virtues, is even more honest, in Marlow's opinion, for being brave enough to face whatever evil he has within himself as a human being. Witnessing how, even an intellectual like Kurtz can transform into a primitive so easily, makes Marlow realize that civilization is nothing more than pretension beyond which is man's primitive self. Europeans' considering civilization as a very important acquisition is hypocritical and leads to corruption. Man's liability to become corrupt, in this sense, is an ontological fact related to humankind altogether, for Conrad. Nick, in Fitzgerald, as a member of upper class society himself, follows a similar pattern with that of Marlow, in his experience with Gatsby whom he first knows as his nextdoor neighbour that gives extravagant parties in his grand mansion, and who is reputed, at the same time, for his illegal commitment to the underworld. When Nick gets to know Gatsby in the end, and when he witnesses the upper class people's selfishness and cruelty that causes Gatsby's death, he realizes the hypocrisy of this society. Represented by Buchanans and guests coming to Gatsby's parties, members of this society feel superior for being civilized. Beyond their sense of superiority and their contempt for "outlaws" like Gatsby, and their anxiety over the future of "civilization", which they believe is threatened by people like Gatsby, lies, however, their own hypocrisy and corruption. Like Europeans in *Heart of Darkness*, this specific society which Nick meets in the East pretends to be honest and civilized. Gatsby, however, whose only motive in getting involved into the illegal underworld is love, is more honest, in Nick's opinion, in comparison to members of this upper-class society.

Thus, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby* are similar in dealing with corruption-civilization dichotomy as their subject matter and in employing first person narrators, Marlow and Nick, as witnesses of the main characters and their societies. Despite these parallels, however, *Heart of Darkness* and *The Great Gatsby* differ to a large extent, especially through their first person narrators who represent different levels of consciousness as mouthpieces of their authors. Both authors deal with corruption, and corruption for both originates from the hypocritical attitude which considers civilization as a virtue in itself. They differ, however, in their handling of the source of hypocrisy, which refers, at the same time, to the authors' sense of reality.

For Fitzgerald, hypocrisy and evil are social phenomenon which are associated with the specific upper-class society which the narrator witnesses in the east. Nick associates this evil with his society, which he hopes to leave behind in leaving the East for his hometown in the Mid-West. For Conrad, on the other hand, evil in man is an ontologic fact which is repressed by social institutions of civilization. Civilized, in this context, does not mean an improved state of being, but can be defined just as repressed primitivity. Depending on this perception of humankind Conrad's Marlow respects the natives of Africa for being more honest and reliable because they are not artificial and hypocritical. Finally, parallels between the two novels do not assure the same depth in the author's handling of reality. Though the narrators follow, technically, a similar pattern they differ highly in their sense of reality : For Nick, reality is that of a corrupt society in New York in 1920s, the values of which clash with his own romantic expectations. Marlow, on the other hand, deals with reality in terms of human nature which is liable to corruption even in the civilized. Fitzgerald benefits from Conrad's technique in touching upon reality on the man and society scale, whereas Conrad himself is preoccupied with a reality which penetrates deeper into man's nature altogether.

Notes

- ¹ R.E. Long bases his argument on proving not only Conradian influences but considering *The Great Gatsby* as a novel written in the European Tradition.(476) Robert Roulston, on the other hand, traces not only Conradian influences but the influence of many other writers such as Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, George Penderevo etc.Donaldson is another important critic discussing similarities.
- ² "Spiritual cannibalism" is an idea first used by Oswald Spengler in his *The Decline of the West*. It is a term used to refer to characters who consider the world as a spoil. It was in Conrad as well, and Fitzgerald is suggested to be inspired by the same idea."Isolated hero" – Stallman refers to both Gatsby and Kurtz as isolated heroes for having "bad names and pursued by calumny"(Stallman 448-450).
- ³ Many critics consider Conrad as justifying imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*. African writer Chinua Achebe condemns Conrad for supporting imperialism by his othering attitude to Africans; Benita Parry suggests that Conrad holds an imperialistic attitude even though he seems to be criticizing colonialism as "robbery with violence". Underneath, however, he approves "Europe's illusory pure form" (38); Raval regards *Heart of Darkness* as a work re-imposing imperial notions through Kurtz's egotism and idealism.
- ⁴ Gatsby's story is regarded by many critics, Ornstein for example, as a metaphor of the "betrayal of the naive American Dream in a corrupt society" (240) Many other critics such as Bewley and Matterson discuss *The Great Gatsby* in relation to American Dream" (23-48)
- ⁵ "Papier mache" is the French word used for the technique of making dolls out of papers. In Conrad this term is used as "Papier Mache Mephistopheles" to refer to the manager's vices. The manager, however, lacks Mephistopheles's depth. So, he is a puppet only in comparison to Mephistopheles.

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