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Rebellion in Times of Wealth: *The Great Gatsby*
(1925) and *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

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Abstract:

Este ensayo ofrece un análisis de dos novelas americanas ampliamente estudiadas: *El gran Gatsby* (1925), escrita por F. Scott Fitzgerald y *El Guardián entre el centeno* (1951), escrita por J.D. Salinger. El principal propósito del trabajo es analizar la relación establecida entre estas novelas y sus respectivos contextos históricos y sociales, así como la reacción de rebeldía de ambos protagonistas con respecto a dichos contextos. El análisis ha sido llevado a cabo explorando diferentes conceptos en ambas novelas: la narratología, los contextos socio-económicos y culturales de Estados Unidos reflejados en las novelas, y el sentimiento de rebelión característico de ambos períodos y representado por los personajes principales. El ensayo trata de comparar ambas novelas, resaltando las diferencias y similitudes y poniendo especial énfasis en el fracaso de la actitud rebelde de los protagonistas en tiempos de prosperidad económica.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore the ways in which contextual aspects like the society and ideology of a period can shape the main characters of the novels written in that specific period, as seen in the novels *The Great Gatsby* (1925), written by Scott Fitzgerald and *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D. Salinger. In order to do so I will analyze the characters of Jay Gatsby and Holden Caulfield, focusing on how they reflect the prevailing ideologies during two post-war moments in the United States: the 1920s and the 1950s. Since these are two periods characterized by both a prosperous economy and the rise of rebellious groups, the idea of reaction and rebellion will also be analyzed in connection with both main characters. As a means to develop this, firstly, the most relevant narratological aspects in the novels will be considered, highlighting the opposition between the autodiegetic narrator in *The Catcher in the Rye* and the homodiegetic narrator in *The Great Gatsby* and how their narratives portray the different characters. Secondly, the context of the two different periods and the way this context is reflected in the portrayal of the main characters will also be studied, and finally, the idea of reaction and rebellion as a result of both characters' personalities and social environment.

2. Narrative perspectives

The Great Gatsby depicts the story of Jay Gatsby, a new rich in 1922 New York whose dream is to be again with the woman of his dreams: Daisy, a high class woman who is now married to Tom Buchanan. The story is told by the homodiegetic narrator Nick, Daisy's cousin and Gatsby's neighbor in West Egg and eventually his only real friend as they get to know each other. Although Gatsby manages to be with Daisy for a short time, the difficulties turn against him and finally his dream is frustrated. On the other hand, *The Catcher in the Rye* is set in the 1950s and deals with a couple of days in the life of the depressed wealthy teenager Holden Caulfield, showing his impressions about society and the world. He undergoes different situations in his high school and in New York, highlighting his dislike for education and for most people. Some people from his surroundings try to help him to be aware of the importance of education and, at the end, he seems to change his mind and accept the society he hates.

The narratological study of both novels is a first step in the analysis of the main characters and their significance. Before starting the analysis per se, it is important to provide a definition of narratology. In this case, I am going to use the one put forward by the French literary theorist Gerard Genette in his seminal book *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method*, in which he distinguishes between five main concepts in a narrative: order, frequency, duration, voice and mode. Out of these five concepts, I will focus on voice for the analysis, and, more specifically, on the concept of person. According to Genette, there are two types of narrators depending on their position in reference to the story: heterodiegetic, when “the narrator is absent from the story he tells” (244) and homodiegetic, when “the narrator is present as a character in the story he tells” (245).

Following Genette’s theory, both novels analyzed present homodiegetic narrators: both Holden Caulfield and Nick Carraway tell the story and are relevant characters in it. However, there is a further distinction that we should consider within the concept of homodiegetic narrator Genette distinguishes between the narrator “who is a hero of the narrative”, known as autodiegetic; and the narrator “who plays only a secondary role” (245). Therefore, Holden is an autodiegetic narrator while Nick is just a homodiegetic one. However, as this essay focuses on the analysis of the characters of Holden Caulfield and Jay Gatsby, it is relevant to mention that the perspective from which the reader gets to know them is very different. The narration and the type of narrator are closely linked to the portrayal of the characters analyzed: in the case of Holden, since he is the autodiegetic narrator of his story, he presents and describes himself throughout the narration of his story, allowing for a more direct account of his character and his experiences. In the case of Jay Gatsby, he is presented to the reader through the homodiegetic narrator Nick Carraway, who provides a description of Gatsby from his own perspective. The narratological analysis is essential since “our knowledge of the narrator will establish the limits of our knowledge of the whole action” (Aiken *et al* 64), and therefore the narrators are responsible for the reader’s perception of the story.

2.1 Jay Gatsby as object of the narration

Starting with the analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, as it has been pointed out before, Nick is the main filter of Gatsby’s story. A very characteristic feature of this novel is that the mystery that surrounds the character of Jay Gatsby is achieved by the fact that the reader lacks Gatsby’s direct perspective in most of the story. It is through his friend Nick Carraway that his personality and secrets are revealed to the reader. Therefore, there is

no means to get to know Gatsby in a complete and reliable way, since the main source is Nick's biased opinion. A good example of how Nick's prejudices, suppositions and rumors he finds affect his concept of Gatsby can be found in Chapter 3, when Nick attends for the first time to one of the famous parties in Gatsby's house. Before he meets Gatsby, he hears different rumors about his life and adventures that, after the first meeting, are clearly influencing his perception of Gatsby: "I had expected that Mr. Gatsby would be a florid and corpulent person in his middle years. [...] Something in her tone reminded me of the other girl's 'I think he killed a man', and had the effect of stimulating my curiosity" (32).

Nick's narration allows for the establishment of a distance both between him and Gatsby and between the reader and Gatsby. As the reader's knowledge of Gatsby is mediated by Nick, there is a considerable gap between them. Moreover, at the beginning of the novel there is also a clear distance between Nick and Gatsby, which gradually decreases as the story advances and Nick discovers Gatsby's real personality and past. It is possible for the reader to perceive the evolution of their relationship and how, at the end, Nick clearly has a positive opinion about Gatsby, very well exemplified by the last sentence he addresses to him: "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together" (98). At the same time, this statement implies a distinction between Gatsby and the rest of the characters, presented along the novel as hypocrite, hurtful and money-interested people. Nick describes Daisy and Tom as: "careless people, [...] they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness" (114). As commented before, Nick's opinion about Gatsby evolves as the story moves forward. This idea is backed by David H. Lynn in *The Hero's Tale*: "Within the action of the story, Nick's judgement varies dramatically from moment to moment as he confronts the contradiction apparent in Gatsby. As narrator, however, Nick is able to comprehend these paradoxes" (77). This idea also points out to the concept of the reliability of the narrator. Nick does not seem to be a totally reliable narrator, as it can be appreciated by some of his ambiguous affirmations, for example when he says: "I have been drunk just twice in my life, and the second time was that afternoon" (20) and then recounts how he gets drunk again in Gatsby's party. However, his ability to become aware of Gatsby's good nature and the rest of the character's ill nature at the end, enables the reader to finally trust him.

Nick's narration portrays both Gatsby's personality and past. It is through him that the reader discovers step by step the nature of Gatsby's dream and ambitions. Thanks to

Nick's narration we learn that the initially superficial figure of Gatsby turns into the figure of a tragic hero who is capable of everything in order to achieve his most desirable dream: Daisy, the love of his life. As the truth is discovered, the idea of Gatsby as a liar and mysterious character is altered. Gatsby's unreliability had been exemplified in how he lies to Nick about his life: "I'll tell you God's truth. [...] I am the son of some wealthy people in the Middle West—all dead now" (42). In a moment that is not specified but seems to be near the ending ("Moreover, he told it to me at a time of confusion, when I had reached the point of believing everything and nothing about him" [64-65]), he finally tells Nick the truth about his past and humble origins (chapter 6), allowing his friend to eventually trust him completely.

Due to Gatsby's condition as "new rich", he invents a totally new life to tell every time that people ask him about his origins, trying to avoid the hypocritical judgement of the real upper-class people. He is conscious about the gap between the working class people, like his parents, and the upper-classes belonging to former rich generations, like Daisy and Tom. Therefore, it seems that this is one of the main reasons why he creates a false story about his past and defines himself as "a son of God" (63), trying to put a distance between him and his parents. In a way, he is just as superficial and money-interested as the upper-class people that he tries to imitate. Despite his humble origins, his personality and ideology are closer to the upper-class ideals, being a very ambitious man, as Cody points out, Gatsby "was quick and extravagantly ambitious" (64). This ambition is clearly noticeable in Gatsby's pursuit of his dream. As Nick is told by Gatsby, his dream and the invention of a new life began when he was seventeen years old: "So he invented just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen-year-old boy would be likely to invent, and to this conception he was faithful to the end" (63). This fact and the moment in which he meets Daisy are decisive for his future life, as they forge and determine his actions and goals in the following years. Gatsby believes blindly in his dream, without realizing that he is believing in an idealistic and perfect version of Daisy that she is not going to resemble in reality. As David H. Lynn asserts, "The immense intensity of the dream, after all, has been shaped by the imagination of seventeen-year-old James Gatz" (86), being hence a dream almost impossible to fulfill. Gatsby's dream seems to have two dimensions closely connected, one personal and another determined by the society and context of the time. On the one hand his dream of becoming rich is clearly linked to a personal fact, his love for Daisy, and the certainty that he can only be with her if he

achieves her social status. In that way he manages to be closer to Daisy, as Jordan states: “Gatsby bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay” (51). The house symbolizes not only his money and new upper-class condition but also the idea that he can almost grasp Daisy, who lives just in front of him. On the other hand, his dream and ambitions are related to the context of the time, characterized by the excess of money and the prosperity, as will be later analyzed. Gatsby feels that he does not belong to his background and longs for a change.

2.2 Holden Caulfield as a world-weary narrator

Regarding *The Catcher in the Rye*'s narratology, although it also presents a homodiegetic narrator, the effect that it takes in the portrayal of the main character, Holden Caulfield, differs from the one achieved by Nick's narration in *The Great Gatsby*. Holden is actually the autodiegetic narrator of his story; therefore, he presents the events from his own perspective, enabling the reader to see the world through his eyes. One of the effects achieved by this narratological technique is that, as the narrator is explaining his own feelings and ideas the unreliability in the narrator is less likely to be detected. Unlike in *The Great Gatsby*, where Nick was the mediator of the information about Gatsby, in *The Catcher in the Rye* the reader receives a direct account of the protagonist's thoughts and impressions. Moreover, the fact that Holden addresses the reader in numerous occasions lessens the distance between him and the reader: “I could probably tell you what I did after I went home” (230). Nevertheless, he can also manipulate the truth, as his narration is characterized by subjectivity. There are certain evidences of his ability to lie and cheat on people, for example when he meets Morrow's mother in the train to New York. He even recognizes the difficulties he has to avoid lying: “I'm the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life” (17); “Just to stop lying. Once I get started, I can go on for hours if I feel like it. No kidding. *Hours*” (62).

In his narration, Holden presents himself as a depressed teenager who is tired of his life and has no goal in it. All the people around him seem to be concerned with his future except for him. In contrast with Gatsby and his endless pursuit of his dream, Holden does not have any ambition, and more than pursuing something he seems to be trying to escape from everything. He belongs to an upper-class family as he himself claims: “My father's quite wealthy, though [...] He's a corporation lawyer” (116); and he is often addressed: “High-class kid like you?” (111). In spite of this wealthy background, he defines the people from that sphere of society as “phonies”. He especially meets this kind

of people in the different schools that he attends: “One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies” (14). This aversion towards the high-class and the excess of money is so extreme that it produces a feeling of sadness in Holden: “Goddam money. It always ends up making you blue as hell” (122). Unlike Gatsby that yearns to belong to the upper-class society since his youth, Holden wants to grow apart from the hypocritical ideology and pomposity of this kind of society.

His weariness and his continuous state of sadness and depression are evident throughout the whole novel. When he explains the behavior of the high-class society that he cannot stand, Holden expresses in a very explicit way the feelings that it arouses on him: “It makes me so depressed I go crazy” (15). These feelings of depression and loneliness appear also in other kind of circumstances, as when he is offered to hire a prostitute at the hotel: “It was against my principles and all, but I was feeling so depressed I didn’t even think” (99). At certain moments, the feeling of loneliness is so extreme that he even thinks about death: “I felt so lonesome all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead” (51). This loneliness and alienation from the rest is very similar to what Nick feels after Gatsby’s death, when almost nobody is willing to attend his funeral. Nick imagines Gatsby’s words longing for some company, afraid of dying alone: “You’ve got to try hard. I can’t go through this alone” (105). In this sense, the evolution of the protagonists is the opposite: Gatsby lives believing in the affection of the people that surround him and attend his parties but dies with the only company of three people; whereas Holden maintains an attitude of distance towards his future and the people around him to finally come to his senses, changing his mindset: “A lot of people, especially this psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I’m going to apply myself when I go back to school next September. [...] I think I am, but how do I know?” (230).

3. The 1920s and the 1950s: prosperity and anxiety

The historical context that frames both novels is essential for the development of their plots and characters. Both main characters are influenced by the socio-economical context of their times that share a main similarity: a prosperous economy after the end of a World War. Historical and social context in both novels is so important that it shapes the characters’ decisions and acts that differ in each novel since Gatsby’s and Caulfield’s reactions to wealth are apparently very different.

3.1 Jay Gatsby: from rags to riches and back.

The roaring 20s or Jazz Age is the context in which *The Great Gatsby* takes place. This epoch was characterized by the economic prosperity that followed WWI (Boyer *et al* 525). This prosperity is illustrated in the novel in the excessive luxury that predominates in the characters and their houses, and also the pompous parties that Gatsby throws. There was also an expansion of American capitalism brought about by the creation of the assembly-line, especially used in automobile companies like Ford. The importance of cars as a symbol of wealth and prosperity is very well depicted by the cars that Gatsby possesses, especially his Rolls-Royce that is a key element at the end of the story. Another significant fact occurring during this decade is the considerable growth of the cities to the detriment of the rural areas and people (Boyer *et al* 531), leading to the extension of the mass consumer society. This relevance and progressive growth of cities is well depicted in *The Great Gatsby*: West Egg and East Egg are presented as extensions of New York City inhabited mainly by upper-class people living in their mansions (Fitzgerald 5-6). Moreover, NYC also plays a relevant role in the novel, as the main characters travel there to enjoy a more cosmopolitan environment. The creation of the mass consumer society was a result of the economical affluence and the commercialization of new commodities such as the radio, the cinema, the automobile and the phonograph among others (Foner 761-762).

This is closely related to the concept of the “American dream”, very popular during this period. The “dream” was understood as the achievement of economic independence with the possibility of acquiring most of the new commodities of the time and therefore the idea of becoming a “self-made man”. In the novel Gatsby clearly achieves this dream but just as a means to be with Daisy, who is the ultimate embodiment of his dream. As a consequence of the mass consumer society and the “American dream”, the notion of work also changed from “a source of pride in craft skill” to “the path of individual fulfillment through consumption and entertainment” (Foner 763). This is exactly what work means for Gatsby, as he only works and obtains money by different obscure means in order to fulfill his dream of being with Daisy. One of the ways in which he earns part of his fortune is by bootlegging, the traffic of alcohol during its prohibition in the USA. Prohibition of alcohol was without doubt another characteristic aspect of the 20s, which brought about a number of alternative practices to obtain the banned drink: the private manufacturing and subsequent illegal selling of alcohol, the running of

speakeasies and the mentioned bootlegging business (Brogan 518). Gatsby's implication in this practice is one of the facts that reveals his tendency towards rebellion that will be later analyzed in detail.

3.2 Holden Caulfield: escaping the phonies

The Catcher in the Rye is set in the America of the 1950s. As in the case of the 1920s, this period was characterized by economic prosperity and affluence after a World War. According to Paul S. Boyer *et al* in *The Enduring Vision*, the 1950s could be considered “the fulfillment of the American dream” (643). During this period, there was a reaffirmation of “a conception of freedom centered on economic abundance and consumer choice” (Foner 916) that emerged during the 1920s. However, in the case of this novel, the pomposity and luxury representative of the time are not an important part in the story since the protagonist is trying to get out of that kind of society in spite of his upper-class background. Another important event in this period is the flourishing of education, there was an increase in the number of students and therefore of schools and colleges. There was also a promotion of sociability and self-expression over logical subjects such as math or science (Boyer *et al* 648). Education is one of the main themes in the novel, especially Holden's rebellious attitudes towards it. He is presented as a rebellious boy who is expelled from every school and refuses to conform to social norms since he prefers to follow his own rules. Rebellion was another main characteristic of the time, especially among teenagers. There was a new popular culture dominated by rebellious looks, represented by artists like Elvis Presley and an interest in new forms of entertainment such as supposedly “violent comic books” (Foner 940-941). Another relevant social characteristic of the time was the role of women. After WWII, the female workers that helped to maintain the country during the absence of soldiers lost their industrial jobs. The role of women experienced a step backwards, returning to their former roles as mothers and wives that dedicate their lives to the family and home. The only jobs that women were able to maintain were the ones related to sales and service labor among others, characterized by a low salary and recognition (Foner 922-923). This is reflected in Salinger's novel in the fact that all the figures of authority, especially the ones related to education, are men. Holden does not mention any influential teacher that is a woman, her sister Phoebe being the only female character that has relevance and influence.

4. Rebellion in times of prosperity

The rebellious tendency that characterizes both main characters in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Catcher in the Rye* is very relevant in this analysis. This rebellion is in both the result of their own personalities and experiences together with the influence of the context of the periods. Therefore, despite the fact that they express this rebellious tendency in different ways, they share the same spirit that was a significant element of both the 1920s and the 1950s as it has been previously explained. In this sense they share some similarities but mainly present notorious differences.

4.1 Jay Gatsby: rebelling in order to conform

First of all, Gatsby seems to rebel against his fate but, at the same time, he also seems to follow society's social norms as a way to fulfill his dream. Since his childhood he has never accepted his parents' humble background. As Nick explains: "his imagination had never really accepted them as his parents at all" (63) and, therefore, he is not willing to accept his destiny as a member of the low-class. This is not a decision influenced by society, but self-imposed by him. He rebels against his family background and traditions and follows his own path. This idea can be interpreted in two ways: he is rebelling against his origins and family, trying to radically change his life; but he is also accepting society's obsession with class improvement and becoming a self-made man, as many people did during the 1920s. When he later falls in love with Daisy, his initial plan is encouraged by his desire to be with her after apparently achieving her same social status.

Once he attains this new social status, despite the fact that he is almost fully part of the upper-class, he always maintains a distance and he is clearly different from the rest of people that conform that group. He is not as hypocrite as them and prefers to remain on the sidelines. This is evident by the fact that most of the people that attend his parties do not know him personally. Nick has even trouble to find him in one of his parties: "As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts [...] denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements" (28). In addition, he shows through his actions that he cares about people, especially Nick and Daisy, which is not a frequent characteristic among the money-interested people, as Tom and Daisy show. Gatsby wants Daisy and Nick to feel comfortable and happy and consequently he is very attentive to them, as when Nick is going to invite Daisy to his

house and Gatsby shows his humility and gratitude by saying: “I don’t want to put you to any trouble” (52). An example of the affection and protection towards Daisy is presented after the accident and subsequent murder of Myrtle, when Gatsby stays outside the house to look after Daisy: “I’m just going to wait here and see if he tries to bother her about that unpleasantness this afternoon” (92).

Another example of his rebellion, explicitly linked with the historical context, is the fact that he is part of the bootlegging business, which can be seen as a form of rebellion against the prohibition of alcohol under the Eighteenth Amendment of the Constitution that started to be effective in 1920. Gatsby’s need to enter this kind of business establishes a clear separation between the ‘old money’ people like Tom and Daisy, and the ‘new money’ or self-made men such as Gatsby that sometimes had to resort to illegal practices in order to obtain great amounts of money. His rebellion towards the impossibility of changing the past is also very significant since it defines his actions and his life at the moment of the narration. Gatsby firmly believes in the possibility of changing some events of the last five years and return to the happy moment in which he was with Daisy. As he claims: “I’m going to fix everything just the way it was before” (71). He is trapped by his memories of Daisy and has idealized them to the point of creating an impossible dream that cannot be fulfilled. He even tells Nick: “I don’t think she ever loved him” (96), therefore denying any feelings Daisy may have towards Tom that could be an obstacle in the pursuit of his final objective. In this matter, Nick not only narrates but also embodies the voice of reason, as he is aware that it is impossible to relive a past moment (“You can’t repeat the past” [70]) and tries to convince Gatsby about the unfeasibility of his plan. He is able to see Gatsby’s love story from an external and non-biased perspective. Through his narration, the reader also becomes a witness of Gatsby’s struggle to amend the past. Gatsby’s rebellious attitude is even against the honest and helpful advice of Nick, who finally turns to be his only true friend.

4.2 Holden Caulfield: rebellion against conformity

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden expresses a rebellious attitude towards different issues since the hypocrisy of society and education are his main concerns. Holden benefits from the economic affluence of the time: his parents are wealthy and he is sent to the best schools of the State. This fact provides him with a personal experience of this high class society that shapes his opinion about it. Holden makes a clear distinction between what he considers a sincere person and a “phony” or false person, always defining himself as

a sincere and transparent boy: “I figured that anybody that hates the movies as much as I do, I’d be a phony if I let them stick me in a movie short” (84). As Jonathan Baumbach states, Holden is presented as “clearly superior to his surroundings” (53), idea well illustrated by his belonging to the “sincere” people group. Most of the people that Holden encounters during the two days that he narrates are described by him as phony. For example, Sally, the girl that he meets in New York: “She was quite a little phony.” (115). The only people he describes as “nice”, apart from his sister Phoebe, are the two nuns he encounters at the station that, according to his description of them, could be part of the group he labels as “sincere”: “She certainly was nice” (121); “I said I’d enjoyed talking to them a lot, too. I meant it, too” (121). In order to express his disappointment with the hypocrites or “phonies”, Holden employs sarcasm as a sort of weapon, especially when he speaks with his mates at Pencey School: “You’re a real prince. You’re a gentleman and a scholar, kid” (50); “I wouldn’t abuse your goddam hospitality” (52). In this way, he states his opinion about hypocrisy and at the same time attacks in a witty manner this kind of behavior.

Another relevant way in which Holden expresses his discontent with society and his rebellious nature is by refusing to study or get involved in school, and therefore his parents feel the need to send him to different schools so as to try to improve his situation. Throughout the novel there are different people that try to help Holden to find a goal in life and worry about the future but Holden does not seem to be bothered: “Oh, I feel some concern about my future, all right. [...] But not too much, I guess” (15). He describes in detail these people, giving his impressions about them. Despite his dislike for school, two of the people that most influence him are teachers: Mr. Spencer and Mr. Antolini. Both are worried about Holden’s attitude towards education, but it is the encounter with Mr. Antolini that is most significant. They discuss the topic of education and the future, and Mr. Antolini offers Holden some helpful advice and tries to “guide the boy into an intellectual channel that will both stimulate and comfort him” (Galloway 206). However, this just ends in another disappointment for Holden, as “this message is destroyed when Holden awakens to find Mr. Antolini petting him” (Galloway 206). This event seems to lead Holden one step backwards: when he was starting to trust some people and begin to think about changing his life, the hypocrisy and corruption of society attacks him again.

Another important influence for Holden and perhaps the most determinately against his rebellion and irresponsibility, is his sister Phoebe. He brilliantly expresses

through his own words the affection and love he feels for her: “You should see her. You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life” (72). Although his sister is younger than him, she is presented as a very mature girl who tries to discover the reasons for his brother’s attitude towards life, asking him to think about his future: “Name something you’d like to be” (185). Holden’s answer represents the definite portrayal of his personality and ideology: he pictures himself in a field of rye, saving some children from falling through a cliff: “I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it’s crazy, but that’s the only thing I’d really like to be” (186). The role that he imagines for himself is related to his apparently humble, sincere personality, willing to be detached from the corrupted society, that is the reason why he wants to be “the protector who stops children before they enter the world of destruction and phoniness” (Galloway 207). These children can be compared to him, who is unwilling to become an adult and worry about the future, maintaining an attitude of defiance and misbehavior towards the world.

Violence is another symbol of rebellion used by Holden. He sometimes reacts against people’s “phony” behavior by having violent thoughts or by actually using violence. There are two main moments in the novel in which people misbehave towards him and, although he describes himself as a pacific boy incapable of getting involved in a fight (48, 98), he reacts by describing the violent and controversial thoughts that emerge in his mind after such episodes. The first one refers to the moment in which his gloves were stolen at Pencey and he describes how he would be incapable of fighting the thief in case he had found him. However, he depicts a very violent alternative reaction to a fist fight: “I’d rather push a guy out the window or chop his head off with an ax than sock him in the jaw” (98). The other relevant episode is when Maurice, the elevator guy at the hotel, swindles Holden by asking him more money and finally beats him when he refuses to pay it. Holden then imagines an alternative ending in which he would have a gun and would shoot him “six shots right through his fat hairy belly” (113). This excessive violence that the protagonist imagines could be interpreted as a way of trying to get over a traumatic experience, in this case the death of his younger brother Allie. In fact, Holden’s reaction to his death was a real act of violence: “...and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it” (40-41). The fact that he had to come to terms with such a traumatic event when he was very young explains his recurrent depressive feelings and his careless attitude towards his future. As Edwin Haviland Miller states, his rebelliousness could be seen as “his only means of dealing with his inability to come to

terms with the death of his brother” (74). In his description of Allie it becomes evident that his death meant the loss of one of his most beloved persons: “He was also the nicest, in lots of ways [...] God, he was a nice kid, though” (40). This trauma is explicitly evident at the end of the novel when, after the incident with Mr. Antolini, Holden is walking on the street and imagines he is talking to his brother: “I’d say to him, ‘Allie don’t let me disappear’” (213). The fact that he asks his deceased brother for help and his fear of disappearing suggest that he feels lost and incapable of overcoming this sad event that marked his childhood.

The last manifestation of his rebelliousness is his idea of escaping from society. During his conversation with Sally, he reaches the conclusion that he dislikes almost everything: “I don’t get hardly anything out of anything” (142). This idea acts as a turning point in his mind, leading him to what seems to be the logical solution to his problems: to escape to another state together with Sally and start a new life there, away from the society he hates (142-143). Holden’s plan clearly depicts his refusal to grow up and become part of the “phony” society: “I said no, there wouldn’t be marvelous places to go to after I went to college and all” (143). He believes in a dreamy life away from the responsibilities of the adult world, which symbolizes a clear link with the Hippie movement that would appear at the end of the decade and would defend an ideology focused on love, peace and nature, implying the separation of the new generation from the old generation’s values and ideology. These previous generation’s values were clearly presented in *The Great Gatsby*, where society puts money and commodities over human feelings and relations.

5. Conclusion

Both Holden and Gatsby can be regarded as tragic heroes in their respective stories. They are heroes in quest for answers and new goals. Gatsby fights against socio-economical obstacles in order to recover Daisy’s love. After all his efforts and all the difficulties he manages to overcome, his dream turns to be impossible and he ends up tragically paying for Daisy’s errors with his death. Nick’s advice about the impossibility of repeating the past is literally depicted by Gatsby’s death. In the case of Holden, he is a hero in quest for answers about himself and he also fights against the obstacles that society places in his way. However, he is a tragic hero in the sense that he seems incapable of finding his path and he is immersed in a deep depression. Moreover, Mr. Antolini explicitly defines him as a tragic hero: “but I can very clearly see you dying nobly, one

way or another, for some highly unworthy cause” (202). Ironically, what Mr. Antolini predicts for Holden is precisely what happens to Gatsby after trying to protect Daisy. Although he believes in the relevance of himself taking over Daisy’s guilt, the end of the novel shows how unworthy his sacrifice has been, as Daisy does not care about Gatsby and never leaves her snobbish and apathetic attitude.

Given these points, it is clear that both *The Great Gatsby* and *The Catcher in the Rye* are closely linked to the socio-economic and cultural contexts to which they belong, which are the 1920s and the 1950s respectively, mainly characterized by a time of prosperity and an affluent economy. The main characters are described thanks to the narratological techniques used by both writers. However, the knowledge of them that the reader ultimately acquires is very different since it is profoundly shaped by the narrators, achieving more empathy in the case of the autodiegetic narrator Holden. The use of the autodiegetic narrator, giving access to Holden’s thoughts, creates a direct link with the reader that is not possible to achieve with Gatsby. In Gatsby’s case, the homodiegetic narrator creates an air of mystery around Gatsby’s figure.

In both novels the contexts are very well depicted by the social atmosphere conveyed and especially by the choice of characters. Holden and Gatsby’s acts are clearly influenced by their social environments. The context of each novel can also be regarded as an independent element that is present throughout the whole story influencing all the characters and events. Its importance may be more evident in *The Great Gatsby*, exemplified by the parties, high-class commodities and the bootlegging allusions, but in Salinger’s novel it also influences Holden’s personality and ideology as a member of the privileged class. In both novels, in spite of the differences mentioned, the social context accounts for the condition of the main characters as tragic heroes: after struggling and fighting against diverse obstacles, neither of them achieves what he is looking for. In the case of Gatsby, his death symbolizes the highly tragic ending of both his life and his dream; whereas Holden has to renounce to his dream of escaping from society, finally coming to terms with the established education. Another similarity evident after the analysis is that both main characters have a close friend or relative that helps them to be reasonable and face the challenges posed by their surroundings. Gatsby receives the help of Nick Carraway, who acts as the voice of reason, trying to make him aware of the impossibility of his desires, and Holden is helped by his sister Phoebe, who makes him conscious of the importance of education and the future.

At the end of both novels the rebellious attitude of both Gatsby and Holden proves to be worthless. Gatsby is not able to relive the past in spite of his efforts to change his situation and he finally cannot escape his tragic destiny. Holden cannot change nor escape the hypocrisy of the society that surrounds him. Although they come from different social backgrounds, they arrive at the same conclusion: rebellion is not an answer to transform or escape their social class when living in such deterministic social contexts as the 1920s and the 1950s. Ironically enough, the rich and the poor seem equally trapped.

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