



Routledge Research in American Literature and Culture

RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA IN EARLY TWENTIETH- CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

WHEN A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME

Wisam Abughosh Chaleila



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“The Melting Pot,” “The Land of the Free,” “The Land of Opportunity.” These tropes or nicknames apparently reflect the freedom and open-armed welcome that the United States of America offers. However, the chronicles of history do not complement that image. These historical happenings have not often been brought into the focus of Modernist *literary criticism*, though their existence in the record is clear.

This book aims to discuss these chronicles, displaying in great detail the underpinnings and subtle references of racism and xenophobia embedded so deeply in both fictional and real personas, whether they are characters, writers, legislators, or the common people. In the main chapters, literary works are dissected so as to underline the intolerance hidden behind words of righteousness and blind trust, as if such is the norm.

Though history is taught, it is not so thoroughly examined. To our misfortune, we naively think that bigoted ideas are not a thing we could become afflicted with. They are antiques from the past – yet they possessed many hundreds of people and they surround us still. Since we’ve experienced very little change, it seems discipline is necessary to truly attempt to be rid of these ideas.

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When a House is Not a Home

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First published 2021
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this title has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-50867-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-50868-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Newgen Publishing UK

To my husband Basem Khalaila
and to my children Nadine, Thair, Natalie, and Nizar
for constantly reminding me that I am not only a wife and a mom



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Preface

Owing to the rapid technological progress that typifies the new millennium, our world has turned into a small global village. In such a post-Auschwitz modern world which is said to have espoused humanistic values, nurtured liberal reforms, converged diverse views, and narrowed differences, we would very much like to believe that intolerant practices such as racism and xenophobia are declining. When I started writing this monograph five years ago, my ultimate goal was to shed more light on a historical period and literary texts that have been long marginalized and even ignored by the American literary canon; but it never crossed my mind that when I finished it, racist and xenophobic violence would be among the leading-edge phenomena characterizing modern-day America. Murals, dress codes (“black/white/blue lives matter” you name it), symbols of hate, symbols of freedom (depends on the eye of the beholder) seem to have become the new emblems of 2020.

I am not claiming that the nativist thought embedded in American history has vanished, neither am I insinuating that such thought is advocated by the majority, but I was hoping that post-WWII countercurrent views of liberation, freedom, and acceptance would outweigh and overshadow radical convictions. Perhaps it is too early to draw hasty conclusions, and it is definitely too early to conclusively determine the reasons and the extent of detrimental implications of such phenomena. Still, one thing is certain. These old-new occurrences should ever be seen as a warning of a lurking threat that entails cleavage, disunity, and frailty.



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Introduction

This book offers an ambitious reinterpretation and a counternarrative to prevailing narratives about the characteristics of early twentieth-century American Modernist fiction by demonstrating that canonized American works, like much of US society and culture of the early years of the twentieth century, were permeated by notions of racism and xenophobia, monopoly capitalism, and conflicts between materialistic and religious points of view. Specifically, this period was typified by numerous upheavals that knocked the country and spawned never-before-seen shifts marking the emergence of a new America. Such shifts characterized the 1920s' tumultuous epoch which encompassed all bodies of power starting from the Congress, the President, and the Federal courts reaching the simple territorial municipalities, virtually affecting all areas of life – political, social, and cultural. Prohibition, Al Capone, Black Tuesday, KKK, Big Bull Market, and the Red Scare were only some models of the firsthand advents that loomed large in the life of every American. These advents coupled with national panic, disorder, and terror principally after mail-bombs were sent to many people of high-end governmental positions across the country.

While some of these quandaries invited the most scrutiny through the kaleidoscopic lens of various disciplines and though they have been targeted by critics and historians before, early-twentieth-century literature lacks the tribute of integrality as such motifs of centrality have long been downplayed or approached haphazardly or in isolation from one another. Inspired by historical accounts, this book reveals that these notions and sentiments deeply affected the American sense of identity, legacy, and values embodied in the literary representations of houses and homes. As such, it summons these notions by bringing the home-house motif recurrent in the proposed literary works to the forefront and in dialogue with the sociological, cultural, and economical discourses as well as the struggles that took place throughout the historical epoch under consideration. Building on the premise that such handling that betrays and disregards substantial motifs should be revived, six major novels that dwell on houses and homes and noticeably convey concerns about materialism, identity, and immigration have been selected. The novels are Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905), Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922), Theodore Dreiser's *An American*

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Tragedy (1925), Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* (1925), and Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

An overview of these novels demonstrates that they are all about the Midwest and their protagonists share similar destinies. *The Professor's House* tells the story of Professor Godfrey St. Peter of Michigan in the Midwest who, despite his literary achievement winning the Oxford Prize that buys him a new modern house, suffers dissatisfaction. Refusing to move to the new house and keeping his worn study in the old house, he attempts to retain his old life; yet, unable to do so, he almost commits suicide.

An American Tragedy is based on a real, infamous, criminal case that took place in America in 1906. The narrative centers on the rise and fall of ambitious Clyde Griffiths, son of penniless Evangelist street preachers who run Midwestern missionary. After getting a golden chance from his wealthy uncle, Clyde is admitted to the upper class but later he is accused of killing his girlfriend Roberta for impeding his social advancement. Consequently, he gets executed by electrocution.

Main Street (1920) is about college graduate Carol Milford, daughter of Judge Milford of Minnesota, who marries Dr. Will Kennicott of small-town Gopher Prairie. Dissatisfied, she attempts to change the ugly town and its hypocrite middle-class residents, but her attempts are met with resistance and so she succumbs to despair and escapes, leaving the town, her husband, and son. Finally, realizing that her home city has become similar to Gopher Prairie, she yields and returns to town hoping to change it someday.

Babbitt (1922) is a novel about George F. Babbitt, a middle-class real estate salesman, of a Midwestern town called Zenith. Successful and married with three children but dissatisfied, he searches for freedom and attempts to change. As a result, he is ostracized by his clan but yields hoping to be able to realize change in the future.

In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Nick Carraway of Midwestern Minnesota moves to Long Island, New York, and finds out that he lives in the same vicinity as a millionaire called Jay Gatsby. It turns out that Gatsby used to be Nick's cousin's (Daisy's) boyfriend. Having become affluent, Gatsby tries to win Daisy back, but he is rejected because he does not belong to the same class. In the end, he is wrongfully killed.

Finally, *The House of Mirth* (1905) narrates the life of Lily Bart, a strikingly beautiful young lady who belongs to the upper-class Old New York and whose instable social status drives her to seek an affluent husband. Failing to fully conform to her class tenets brings about scandal to her and thus she commits suicide.

Despite their diverse narratives, these six novels have been chosen because in all of them the image of the house is contrasted with that of the home. Moreover, the home-house conceit surpasses the concrete representation of buildings for human habitation. Instead, it encompasses and unfolds in connection with broader concepts of concern such as class, identity, and materialism, particularly with reference to the early twentieth-century American fiction. In addition, each one of them reflects anxieties over newcomers and/or immigrants and the

materialism of American society. The literary representations of homes versus houses provide an extensive platform for making generalizations about and connections with the concurrent capitalistic and materialistic American society. That is, fiction and reality are inextricably interwoven in a sense that the novels overwhelm the reader with the cultural and historical transformations of this specific epoch and contravene him/her to realize their interlinkages with the fictional characters on the one hand, and with the authors themselves on the other. Furthermore, unlike other earlier or later novels which were distanced from this unique setting, these novels were all (except for *The House of Mirth*) written in the Roaring Twenties which signaled the zenith of cultural, political, and economic shifts in America.

The choice of *The Great Gatsby* emerged from the fact that though the novel was published during the same time span as the other novels, Fitzgerald belonged to a younger generation than that of Wharton's, Dreiser's, Cather's, and Lewis'. Hence, whether he harped on perspectives and themes similar to those of his predecessors needed to be examined. As for selecting two novels by Sinclair Lewis, we have tried to attend to the threads that interlace both narratives and simultaneously those that distinguish each one of them. *The House of Mirth* published in 1905 has been employed as a comparative case study to examine the differences and similarities between a 1900s text and 1920s narratives.

The illustration of immigrants as boosters of capitalism and a moral threat to the American home is verbalized both by fictional characters in the novels and by renowned politicians and religious leaders who were prominent and powerful individuals in the real world. To substantiate this claim, original sources to an impressive range of readings in various fields of literature, culture, and history have been distinctively consulted, incorporated, and brought into play to present thematic analyses of the period's socio-political perspective and intellectual, technological, and philosophical developments.

The developments that materialized in the Roaring Twenties with all its decadence and excess is compared to the preceding years of the same century, especially as all the novels explicitly refer to immigrants or newcomers, and in them the relationship between old timers and newcomers features more negatively than positively. The most unyielding instances of related cynicism are the Jewish characters Meyer Wolfshiem and Simon Rosedale who are portrayed as part and parcel of foreign menace and corruption. Then there is the "little kyke" who is deemed as unfit to marry a Gentile (*Gatsby* 38). In *An American Tragedy*, rather than blaming her son's greed for his moral fall and self-destruction, Clyde's mother reproaches materialistic means and immigrant boys: "Oh, that wretched, worldly, showy hotel in Kansas City! Those other bad boys!" (421). Positive examples, though very few, can be traced in *Main Street* where Carol befriends with immigrants and helps them. However, the same protagonist patronizes them when her social status is endangered.

Critics from varied fields have addressed these specific novels from diverse angles. Still, their approaches, though valuable, are not sufficient to serve as a basis for a comprehensive understanding of the literature of the epoch

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as more than just wording, or one that discerns between minor and major currents. For example, Conrad Ostwalt sees *An American Tragedy* as a novel about the secularization of space “The movement from disorientation to orientation-is the secularization of American space ... but this secularization also becomes the occasion for the appearance of new beliefs and affirmations concerning spatial orientation and relationships” (13). Ann Moseley deems *The Professor’s House* as a book about spatial structures (197–198), while Laura Winters refers to the “house” as a possession or an asset that stands for specific values such as “the family happiness, the artifacts of a bygone civilization” (40). David Stouck considers it as a social critique on America’s 1920s materialism (100), and similarly Brown underlines Cather’s dejection by post-WWI growing materialism (Brown and Edel xiv).¹ Gabrielle Esperdy underscores the novel’s consumer culture of the 1920s. Miles Orvell argues that writing *Main Street*, Lewis sketched a map of a practicable American society that exceeded the mere geography of Middle America as it was usually thought to be; and to comprehend the place in Main Street in the literary culture of the United States, it is imperative to understand Lewis’s *Main Street* and the culture it generated (73). Carol Singley points out that Wharton has invoked principles of the European past “in which dwellings were not built but born” (309), whereas Deborah Esch maintains that Wharton employs houses in a way that enables the writer to expose the character of the persons with regard to their houses. Dreiser’s critics such as Philip Gerber, Alfred Kazin, John McAleer, Charles Shapiro, Robert Elias, W. A. Swanberg, Robert Penn Warren, F. O. Matthiesen, and Marc Dolan mostly focus on the idea of a capitalistic and materialistic American society.

Noticeably, there is a paucity of works that examine racism, xenophobia, or anti-Semitism in the novels except for a few written by authors like Jennie Kassanoff, Hildegard Hoeller, Michael North,² and Nancy Foner. A few more bring up Dreiser’s, Cather’s, and Fitzgerald’s racism and/or anti-Semitism but in a limited extra-authorial fashion, for example, the critiques of David Daiches, Jerome Loving, and Walter Benn Michaels.

In order to offer different kinds of insights and thorough historical and fictional accounts of this particular period, three distinct types of sources have been considered. The first type encompasses retrospective historical revaluations and reinterpretations such as those of Jennie Kassanoff’s and Elizabeth Ammons’, the second entails other older sources such as those of David Daiches’ and Mark Schorer’s, and the third involves contemporaneous accounts such as those of James Roscoe Day’s and Theodore Roosevelt’s.

All in all, the book’s approach to the novels as artistic entities will be three-dimensional: first, the social-historical context; second, the psychoanalytical context; and, third, the thematic analytic context. To this end, the book is organized in five main chapters that will be inherently connected through structure and content so as to provide substantial cohesion and logical consistency. Finally, the concluding paragraphs reconcile the diverse trains of thought delivered in the discussion. Along with dwelling on these novels, the

succeeding chapter will address brief yet indispensable historical and literary accounts of the period.

Notes

- 1 Cather's second biographer was Joseph Leon Edel.
- 2 Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

1 Background

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates
And through them presses a wild, motley throng—
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Fearless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In the street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
Tomas Aldrich, "Unguarded Gates"

Introduction

The national reactions to the far-reaching and fast-paced shifts just mentioned were extreme on the political, social, cultural and even literary levels ranging from legislating anti-immigration laws to espousing Darwinian and Freudian doctrines of race and identity and applying the science of eugenics.

Eric Foner concludes that at the turn of the twentieth century there was a "retreat from the ideals of 'Reconstruction' which went hand in hand with the resurgence of an Anglo-Saxonism that united patriotism, xenophobia, and an ethnocultural definition of nationhood in a renewed rhetoric of racial exclusiveness." Moreover, the "egalitarian vision of citizenship" created by "the Civil War" and "postwar ideal of color-blind citizenship" were replaced by "definitions of American freedom based on Race" (131). Such phenomena as Anglo-Saxonism, the science of eugenics, and American literary naturalism that materialized in America were associated with racial-collective identity.

For the most part, such rejuvenation ensued from the effects of modernity on America. Abby Werlock points out that the deep-seated shifts of the twentieth-century generated a cultural crisis associated with the negative outcomes of modernity such as WWI, racial and gender conflicts, a sense of fragmentation within the once-normative society. Well-held principles of supremacy, religion, class and family were on the verge of collapse and the new Modernist literature

volunteered to mirror these crises: “This radically new modern world could be reflected adequately only in a new order of art, and writers reacted with various formal innovations” (457).

Werlock further argues that “World War I, with its fragmentation of traditions and values, and the consequent rise of modernism, provides a sharp dividing line between the 19th and 20th centuries of American ... fiction.” All Modernist writers of the era “implicitly or explicitly decried the hypocrisy and conformity they saw across the United States and came to see themselves as aliens and outsiders at odds with the changing times” (xi).

The Modernist Era

There is no definitive consensus as to the precise time slot of the Modernist period in the United States. Still, most suggested periods denote the interval between WWI and WWII. While Richard Gray situates the American Modernist era in the period 1910–1940 (13), Monroe Spears maintains that the period ranged between 1909 and 1914 which signaled the formative years of Modernism in arts. Nonetheless, Rachel Potter claims that the Modernist period emerged during 1900–1930, whereas Robert Matuoizzi and others point out that the period transpired between the years 1914 and 1945.

Although Ezra Pound has long been given the credit for verbalizing the famous creed “make it new” (Pound and Pound ix, 472) to hallmark the Modernist era, others – such as Michael Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure (325), Michael North (163), and Samuel Delany (193) – negate him this right. Whether Pound assumed this motto from the Shang emperor Ch’eng T’ang (Alexander 19) or from Richard Wagner’s line from the 1850s “Kinder! Macht Neue! Neue! Und abermals Neues!,”¹ these critics likely agree that “Pound’s translated phrase achieves its canonization as a Modernist slogan at this crucial moment, it seems, because novelty is being redefined under a certain amount of pressure” (North 171).

No matter the definition, the Modernist era heralded the ontology of change in each and every aspect in America. Notions of acceptance and tolerance became irrelevant at a time when identity was threatened by external influences triggering sentiments of racism and xenophobia. These external influences were both abstract and concrete as America was invaded by outlandish philosophies such as Bolshevism, Freudism, and Socialism along with alien arrivals and immigration waves from all over the world. Politicians, intellectuals, religious leaders, and even common citizens were overwhelmed by anxieties as they felt that America that they knew so far was becoming more and more uncanny.

All the same, this epoch signified the zenith of revolutionary technology and anti-immigration laws that were more prejudiced and more severe than had ever been the case before. In response to the chaos that overwhelmed the Western world in particular, new global totalizing cultural narrative schemas were offered by nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century thinkers such as Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx who “fundamentally reoriented

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[the Americans'] modern understanding of biological nature, society, and the human mind. In so doing, they effectively rewrote the agenda of subsequent philosophy and human science" (Caplan and Jennings xi). In this sense, the aftermath of WWI marked a new America where deeply embedded traditions and mainstream societal norms were queried and superseded by new values and philosophies such as those of Darwin's and Freud's. Such philosophies rather carved the American Modernist literature which was heavily influenced by the Modernist movement. However, although many Americans valued the advent of revolutionary technologies, others ardently resisted social change being wrapped by instability and insecurity.

American Modernism derived from breaking with the Victorian conventions and sought to reestablish contact with reality: "Many yearned to smash the glass and breathe freely to experience 'real life' in all its intensity" (Lears 5). Still, some American authors who witnessed the period of transition between the Victorian and the Modernist era like Edith Wharton remained anchored in the nineteenth-century Victorian writing style, drawing widely upon the proprieties of the rigid Victorian society and caught in this transitional point of "the rule-bound certainties of Victorian society and the revolutionary ethos of modernism" (Shearer 131). However, the Victorian conventional writing could not meet the challenges of the new era and even failed to adapt itself and handle the issues that surfaced upon the emergence of its successor such as WWI, mass immigration, cutting-edge technology, mass production, capitalism, metropolitan pandemonium, and sexual libertinism.

Literary modernism sought to respond to such pioneering developments including anxieties coming under the major vicissitudes of the epoch. Notably, such large-scale and rapid transformations were inspiring to many American writers providing an extended framework for their fiction. The historical events dramatized conveyed not only the authors' anxiety and concern regarding these events, but also urged them to question the principles of democracy, the possibility of volition and freewill, the standard of living under the shadow of overcrowded housing and precarious labor conditions (MacGowan 11).

Although the Modernist novel has long been juxtaposed with the realist one, not all writers were exclusively Modernists. Several nineteenth-century writers continued to write into the new era of the twentieth century and therefore were considered realists-modernists as they "blended realist techniques with some amount of modernist experimentation" (Casey 183). The authors in hand are barely Modernist in the ethos they present but more so in addressing modernism as a historical phenomenon that emerged in certain cultural contexts. That is, they are Modernists in their lament and angst over social change and the collapse of particular long-held traditions and values in the new modern world. Simultaneously, they are realists in bringing some of their life experiences into their novels, conveying the beliefs and principles of the time-period society, illustrating settings precisely and graphically, rendering reality elaborately and thoroughly.

Some of these realist-modernist writers were occasionally classified as regional and were called Midwesterners like Willa Cather and Sinclair Lewis

(Werlock xii). While their realism offered colloquial, dynamic, and true-to-life style of American speech and a way of blasting worn-out conventions, their modernism was conveyed in their works which advocated preserving the good values and the good past that WWI razed. They challenged the far-reaching changes by doubting all forms of convictions and long-held “truths.” Simultaneously, these authors were deeply alarmed regarding the repercussions of modernism on America. Hence, they used novel and exploratory literary devices to tackle their concerns regarding chaos, libertinism, identity, cynicism, mystification, and skepticism.

These concerns were translated through the authors’ narratives which illustrated the Lost Generation that came of age during WWI and the Jazz Age of post-WWI. The interlock between realism and modernism is evident in *Babbitt* and *Main Street* which satirize American conformity and social vacuity. A similar nexus is offered by Dreiser’s fictionalization and reworking of the notorious murder committed by Chester Ellsworth Gillette for killing his girlfriend Grace Brown in 1906 in (Knappman 234). Dreiser’s naturalist novel illustrates the protagonist’s struggles against social, environmental, and economic forces. Cather’s novel *The Professor’s House* represents both literary techniques as it “achieves a ‘perpetual twilight’ between realism and modernism where their forms and values interpenetrate” (Murphy 256–257). Undoubtedly, the 1920s novels discussed here are all realist-modernist post-war American novels about moral decadency of an avaricious and materialistic society.

The Authors’ Views

Examining the works of Lewis, Cather, Wharton, and Fitzgerald, among others, Alfred Kazin argues that these writers adopt a new literary style reflecting historical events, directly or indirectly conveying deep national sentiments associated with economic consciousness. He claims that their works demonstrate the deep moral shifts in American society influenced by science, industrialization, and a world war (xxi–xxv).

Although the common view among some scholars is that these novels put the American society in the dock for letting down the immigrants, there have been contradictory outlooks and complex nuances as to the authors’ attitudes toward newcomers. It has even been claimed that some of them were avowed nativists and naturalists who spewed xenophobic rhetoric in their writing. This assumption does not entirely sidestep the adage, as old as the New Criticism of the 1950s, that a novel does more than simply reflect ideas and sentiments prevailing in society and that, in order to properly understand the complex meanings and effects of a novel, one must take into account the specific function a character’s ideas have in the context of the entire novel. The overall function of the character in *Babbitt*, in this case heavily satirical and ironical, and the tone or mode of presentation of the character needs to be taken into account. As such, while the effect of the novel may be the exact opposite of what the character articulates, it definitely harmonizes with the fact that xenophobic

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sentiments were rife in 1920s America. As such, it may well be argued that although some of the authors' works are imbued with satire, their anxieties stemmed from the welter of radical changes and the major social, political, and technological shifts that took over the country.

It is not the intention of this work to arraign all these authors on unsubstantiated charges of racism, nor to lower the boom on them for the mischiefs committed against the immigrants during the epoch at issue. Still, we believe that it is equally important to illuminate some critiques that handle such claim. Certainly, one could build a case on the authors' relatively wavering views, and likewise on their more unambiguous ones as to racism and anti-Semitism particularly when considering their extra-authorial sources.

Along these lines, Walter Benn Michaels inspects the way some writers like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald associate money with races. He argues that *The Great Gatsby* shows how "our society" is classified by race rather than by "economic classes." He presents a definitive depiction of the 1920s as a pinnacle of racial science. In this sense, introducing Meyer Wolfshiem as a fictional representation of Arnold Rothstein² nicknamed as "The Brain," a notorious racketeer and the bigwig of the Jewish mafia is one example to be considered. In a letter to Corey Ford 12 years after *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald describes his method of treating the novel's material:

In *This Side of Paradise* (in a crude way) and in *Gatsby* I selected the stuff to fit a given mood or "hauntedness" or whatever you might call it, rejecting in advance in *Gatsby*, for instance, all the ordinary material for Long Island, big crooks, adultery theme and always starting from the small focal point that impressed me -my own meeting with Arnold Rothstein, for instance.

(Brucoli 8)

Conjuring up the 1912 Rosenthal-Becker murder case and the case of fixing the 1919 World Series – known as the "Black Sox Scandal" – under the auspices of the Jewish gambling syndicate headed by Arnold Rothstein is a blatant allusion to the corruption and criminality of Jews. The Chicago White Sox were bribed by a mediator called Joseph "Sport" Sullivan, directed by Arnold Rothstein to deliberately lose the World Series to the Cincinnati Red Legs (Brucoli 8). Although *The Great Gatsby* did not achieve immediate success upon its publication, it hit the headlines in the 1940s: "*The Great Gatsby* ... has even gained in weight and relevance, which can be said of few American books of its time" (Trilling 251); and once again in 1974, when actor Lee Strasberg assumed the role of Rothstein under the name Hyman Roth in the legendary crime film, *The Godfather II*.

Jay Gatsby's corruption does not circumvent Fitzgerald's criticism. However, Gatsby is not portrayed as a typical Jew and thus the controversy surrounding his origins in available literature. The problem is that most works do not avow Gatsby's racial lineage or at their very best, they are as nebulous as Gatsby's

roots. One study by Michael Nowlin hesitates between Jay Gatsby's Jewishness and blackness:

The textual assertion that Jimmy Gatz was brought up in the Lutheran church, there is enough textual innuendo to make Gatsby a racially troubling figure, whether we want to imagine him as a Jew passing for a gentile, or as an African American passing for "white."

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Michael Pekarofski is one of few who address this predicament and confirm that Gatsby *is* Jewish: "none have explicitly argued that Jay Gatsby is a Jewish American who has concealed his identity in order to transcend class, ethnic, and religious barriers ... just such a claim can be made" (52). Barbara Will underscores the ambiguity concerning the etymology of Jay Gatsby's name. She emphasizes that Gatz family name is assumed both by Jews and Gentiles. She has no doubts as to the fact that Fitzgerald was aware of the name's semantic intricacy:

While the name of "Gatz" is clearly haunted by ethnic, and specifically Jewish, overtones, "Gatz" is also a decidedly ambiguous name. Not *not* Jewish (as opposed to "Gaty," the first version of "Gatz" shown in Fitzgerald's drafts), the name "Gatz" is also not identifiably Jewish (as opposed, for example, to the more common name "Katz").

(133)

Could it be that Fitzgerald misspelled these names consciously or was he unquestionably a "notoriously [bad/poor] speller" as Will and many more others³ claim? In fact, Fitzgerald admits his spelling *faux pas* in 1952 "The spelling and construction of my letters is careless rather than ignorant" (*The Bulletin*). If this is the case, then what is the point of arguing his spelling? Still, one thing is certain, Gatsby's original name *does* bear ethnic complexity otherwise why change his German-sounding name, Gatz, to the more English-sounding Gatsby?

Considering all the assumptions at hand, we believe that Fitzgerald made Gatsby his invisible Jew and juxtaposed him with Wolfshiem in terms of cultural features but not physical ones. Jay Gatsby represents the Jews whose stereotypical physical features receded over time as a result of assimilation. Such assimilation entailed change of name as well. Jewish name changing in America was associated with racial and ethnic identity and the fierce manhunt campaign against Jews, primarily German Jews during WWI and WWII: "name changing was a behavior that relied on state mechanisms and responded to state pressures" (Fermaglich 59). To boot, both world wars played a major role in urging name alteration:

Between 1913 and 1916, roughly 122 [name-change] petitions were submitted each year. In 1917, name change petitions in City Court [of