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Trayana Angelova Lateva

**REPRESENTATIONS OF THE 1920S IN LITERATURE
AND CINEMA**

ABSTRACT

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Academic Jury:

Prof. D.Sc. Kalina Lukova

Prof. D.Sc. Romyana L. Stancheva

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Stoyanova

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetla Cherpokova

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mladen Vlashki

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Introduction

The object of this study are works of Western European and American literature, as well as film and television productions engaged in the representation of the 1920s. In the course of the scientific work, we established that the initially set territorial perimeter was too extensive to be covered in its entirety, so we chose to focus our analytical attempts in the English-speaking field (the USA and England) in the hope that in this way we would eliminate the danger of “scattering”, and hence – of an excessively superficial examination and discussion of the selected titles. The decision is also justified by the heterogeneous dynamics in the unfolding of the cultural and historical processes during the decade in question, assigning a leading position to America, as well as to the literary production in the 20th and 21st centuries, thematizing phenomena characteristic mainly of the American and British reality.

The relevance of the research topic is argued by the trend that emerged in the 1970s towards a re-actualization of interest in the 1920s and their multidimensionality, the renewal of which was registered periodically in the following decades and was subjected to additional intensification after 2010. There is a growth in literary production with a diverse genre orientation, especially in the so-called “young adult” category, engaged in depicting the “Roaring Twenties”; productions intended for the small or the big screen are still actively being filmed, of works written both during “The Jazz Age” and during the years of the new century; large European and American cities are hosting festivals and thematic celebrations, organized in such a manner as to recreate the atmosphere characteristic of the 1920s, largely inspired by F. Scott Fitzgerald's vision in his most famous novel “The Great Gatsby”. The entry into the third decade of the 21st century, and with it into a reality marked by political and economic upheavals, as well as the unexpected development of a new global

pandemic, has set an expectation that the 2020s are destined to repeat certain events from a hundred years ago. Curiosity is also aroused by the generally accepted attitudes, the credibility of which shall be tested in the course of this study, regarding the 1920s as a time of extreme optimism, situated between two historical periods that were burdened by serious destabilization in many respects (World War I, the Great Depression). The choice of topic is also motivated by some significant shortcomings in the field being developed and is inevitably influenced by personal preferences for the period in question.

In order to highlight individual thematic cores and their modes of insertion into literary and film works, we place the material under study in a diachronic and synchronic perspective, with the emphasis placed more on the artistic textuality, and not so much on the representations of the 1920s in the visual arts, such as cinema. The examples cited from there serve the need to probe the models followed and their parallelism or pushback from literary models.

In order to establish whether we could claim that the representations of the 1920s follow specific patterns, as well as to trace their stability over time, we work with authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley, Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, Vladimir Nabokov, Alfred Döblin, Sinclair Lewis and Erich Maria Remarque, some of them mentioned in passing, others studied more deeply and extensively.

Doing research and analysis of several works from the creative portfolio of the same author, as is the case with Evelyn Waugh, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, allows us to trace the creative aspirations and their realization in a chronological plan, so as to seek a reason for the author's interest in the period in question, as well as to mark the stages of development of the preferred thematizations. At the same time, the research activity is oriented so as to follow a

comparative course in order to verify whether ideologies characteristic of the culture of the era are utilized in an identical way in American and English literature or whether significant differences are registered.

I. The 1920s in literature and cinema – dominant thematic orientations

In **the first chapter**, the preparation of the overview of the paradigms characteristic of the decade is approached by building a factual framework relating to the socio-economic and cultural context, which relies on data that is fundamental for further analytical procedures, excerpted from English-language scientific sources. Without aiming to present various titles in a reference form, this part of the dissertation highlights components recognizable for the era, identified as dominant on the basis of their intensive manifestations in literature and cinema – the echo of the First World War, the media-entertainment culture, the passion for cars, the transition from silent films to talkies, changes in the ideas of femininity and the role of women, the American presence on French territory. The nature of the phenomena in question is first presented in its historical specifics, and subsequently its recreation in fictional conditions is discussed.

The echo of World War I was first identified among the persistent motifs in literature and cinema that present representations of the period under study. The research of the titles included in the expanded list of the scope of the dissertation led to results that prove that, compared to other thematic cores, the military theme is integrated into the plots from and about the 1920s with the greatest intensity, although a certain discrepancy is observed between European countries and America, which, however, corresponds to the actual historical situation, hence the scale of the conflict and its outcome in the geographical areas in question.

In direct correlation with the war theme is the theme of the loss of ideals and illusions, which are rationalized as untenable – the unscrupulous, mechanical and violent taking of millions of human lives is a kind of verification of the absence of primordial human qualities, the faith in whose return has been destroyed. This fact also overturns the idea of the “new world”, which is emptied of the values that ennobled life before the outbreak of the war, and condemns people in it to aimless wandering in a desperate search for moral support. In the literature of the 1920s, this search is often reborn in vicious practices – for example, drinking, dancing and giving in to sexual desires are depicted as a means of masking inner confusion and disorder.

The artistic representation of the consequences of the war in more than one case also focuses on the radical reassessment of the understanding of masculinity. The forced deprivation of the ability to react, imposed on some of the men sent to the front, as well as the damage inflicted on the psyche, are considered desecrating to pre-war ideals, thought of as traditional notions, according to which the man is placed in a one-sided plan – as a brave, resilient and determined warrior, unbreakable by the trials of fate.

The examples of the incorporation of military themes into fiction are numerous, and in this dissertation we will focus our attention on only a small part of them – Nick Carraway and Jay Gatsby are veterans of the First World War (“The Great Gatsby”); Anthony Patch serves in the American Expeditionary Force and embarks on an extramarital affair with Dorothy Raycroft during one of the army training sessions (“The Beautiful and the Damned”); Abe North is a war veteran who develops an alcohol addiction that thwarts the continuation of his musical career as a composer (“Tender is the Night”); Jake Barnes was a soldier at the front, where he suffered a physical defeat, as a result of which he lost his potency, and this, in

turn, reflected on his psyche, damaged by his own sense of weakness and inferiority and the inability to fully devote himself to his beloved, Brett (“The Sun Also Rises”); for Heinrich Kroll, nightmares constantly disturb his sleep, and the same plot plays out in them, taking him back to 1918, when he was buried by shells (“The Black Obelisk”); the three comrades (Otto, Robert and Gottfried) from Erich Maria Remarque's novel of the same name also retain traumatic memories of their participation in the war; although wounded, the young medical student Bardamu survives the war, but it leaves lasting consequences in his psyche, which succumbs to nervous breakdowns (“Journey to the End of the Night”); Septimus Smith returns from the front without physical damage, but suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, which does not allow him to live a full life (“Mrs. Dalloway”).

The changes in consumption that stimulated mass production and fueled an increasingly greedy and intrusive consumerism are described, as well as their direct consequences. It is precisely as a derivative of the abundance of products and services that **the passion for cars**, which reached its peak in the 1920s, is interpreted. If in 1900 no more than 8,000 private vehicles crossed American streets, by 1926 they already numbered twenty million (Currell 2009: 6).

In literature and cinema, the automobile is one of the most enduring and recognizable symbols of the modern age, but it usually functions with a sign opposite to that assumed by the historical context. Recognized as a dangerous harbinger of the ever-expanding scale of consumer culture and an expression of the reckless frivolity that many have standardized as natural behavior for the modern age, the automobile flies dizzily across the pages of literary works and repeatedly crosses the big screen, only to lead its drivers to a catastrophic collision, metaphorically representing disorder on both a personal and social level. Examples of this are the vehicle accidents in

“The Great Gatsby”; the intentionally caused collision by Nicole as a result of her worsening insanity in “Tender is the Night”; the road accident that led to the loss of Albinus's sight in “Laughter in the Dark”; the car race accident that is the basis for Agatha's death in „Vile Bodies”; the crash on the sidewalk in front of the Mulberry flower shop, likened to the crack of a revolver, in “Mrs. Dalloway”; Paul's death in “Mothering Sunday” during a car accident.

In addition to being a catalyst for disastrous events, the car is also depicted in a negative aspect in cases where it causes worries for its owner, as it often breaks down (Gertrude Stein's car in “Moveable Feast”, the problems with Wilson's Ford in “The Great Gatsby”, the cars that pass through the car repair shop where Remarque's characters work in “Three Comrades”). Owning a car and its brand is significant in determining the social status of the characters (“The Great Gatsby”, “Brideshead Revisited”), while in other cases it provides the necessary comfort for indulging in love affairs (“The Great Gatsby”, “Berlin Alexanderplatz”, “Vile Bodies”). Symptomatic of the urge for adrenaline-charged experiences are car races, which become one of the biggest attractions of the 1920s (“Vile Bodies”, “Three Comrades”; the films “Easy Virtue” and “Downton Abbey: A New Age”).

The trend towards overconsumption is reflected in Sinclair Lewis's novel “Babbitt”, which is set at the dawn of the new decade. The comforts to which modern people have become accustomed are exposed in the novel – Babbitt is proud that every morning he is woken up by “the finest of the widely advertised and mass-produced alarm clocks, with all the modern conveniences, including a cathedral bell” (Lewis 1982: 14), and he also has other conveniences in his house, the “modern deities” of the 1920s man – a large bathtub, barber's tools, scented soaps, toothbrushes, etc. For Lewis's character, taking care of his appearance is also of paramount importance, so he often thanks the

“god of progress” for his satisfied fashion preferences. The prescription glasses are the final touch in his vision, which contributes to his transformation into the “modern business man” reaching a successful conclusion, and the possession of other accessories and attributes are a guarantee of his smooth integration into society.

Along with the positive changes, some negative aspects of life in the 1920s stand out, primarily characteristic of American reality. Among them, the rise of organized crime and the scandalous violations of certain legal provisions stand out, especially with regard to the ban on the import and sale of alcoholic beverages and dangerous substances. Associated with certain criminal figures and their illegal activities is the widespread opening of the so-called “speakeasies” – bars that do not have a license to sell alcohol. In the period 1920-1933, limiting their influence, which provided them with an unshakable place in American culture, was almost impossible due to the good profits, in turn a prerequisite for the continued growth of the criminal network, as well as the presence of corrupt government officials who did not strictly fulfill their professional duties. After the end of the dry regime, most of them closed their doors and visiting them went out of fashion.

The criminal environment is a theme with not particularly diverse variations in the American version, reduced to a love story between a cabaret performer and a member of the mafia or a hostile conflict between two gangster groups, which is implanted in a large part of the film plots of the 20th and 21st centuries. The list of similar productions includes “Bugsy Malone” (1976), an original version of the classic 1920s crime thriller between rival mafia groups, but with a cast made up entirely of child actors, “Once Upon a Time in America” (1984), “Capone” (1975), “Cotton’s Club” (1984), “The Godfather Part II” (1974), “Bullets Over Broadway” (1994), “The Untouchables” (1987), “Peaky Blinders” (2013-2022), “Boardwalk Empire” (2010-

2014), “Live by Night” (2016), “The St. Valentine's Day Massacre” (1967), “Killers of the Flower Moon” (2023), “Chicago” (2002), “There Will Be Blood” (2007) and “A Slight Case of Murder” (1938). In England, crime novels were also popular, but they had nothing to do with the mafia circles of the vicious American reality. Instead, they focused on detective cases, which was also motivated by the entry of this type of works in the 1920s into the “golden age” of their history, thanks to Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh.

The dissertation also touches on another significant innovation in the context of the 1920s – **the transition from silent films to the so-called “talkies”**, which found its realization in the second half of the decade and is unanimously categorized as a turning point for the art of cinema (Andreykov 2004: 15). The main goal, apart from presenting a brief factual overview of the advantages and disadvantages that arose as a result of the newly introduced requirements and recommendations, is to examine whether the current fascination with cinema for the era is also reflected in literature, as well as what are the ways of implanting it on a structural and content level.

There are two applicable models – in the first case, we are talking about handling cinematic techniques adapted to the respective work in such a way as to serve its needs in structural, compositional and/or stylistic terms, while in the second case, film art is a plot-building element (for example, there is a character who practices the acting profession or strives to master it). In addition to verbal art, we also focused our studies on several productions from the 21st century, and we came to the conclusion that while in its literary variations the theme of cinema receives more diverse uses, film art seems to be fully engaged in the artistic representation of the turning point for the

technological progress of the industry, which in most cases results in resorting to the “film within a film” technique.

An example of utilizing the interaction between the two arts is F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels from the 1920s and 1930s – “The Beautiful and the Damned” (1922), “The Great Gatsby” (1925) and “Tender is the Night” (1934). Among the listed titles, the one that has been subjected to the most numerous and comprehensive interpretations is certainly the second, and the topic of the significance of film and theater art has not escaped the attention of critics. A frequently observed phenomenon is the association of the image of Daisy with Hollywood, and that of Gatsby with Broadway. Certain techniques used in cinema find use in Fitzgerald's novel – the abrupt interruption of one scene to move on to the next is equivalent to montage, in which the frame is unexpectedly replaced by the next, not necessarily correlative to the previous one, and the transition from a description of the private to the collective and vice versa is reminiscent of the close and distant frames in the art of cinema. Analogies to it are also registered at a stylistic level – the characters include in their lexical stock terms specific to “the seventh art” or make analogies with cinematic techniques.

In “The Beautiful and the Damned” Gloria Gilbert dreams of becoming an actress, but does not express a willingness to make efforts to reach the cherished goal. The author's critical assessment is not limited to the unfounded pursuit of ever more material goods, which is doomed to remain unsatisfied, and the absurd and hollow existence of the American elite, but also to the standards of beauty imposed by society, whose dominant position in the system of values of the new era is detrimental to any beginning of spiritual progress.

In “Tender is the Night”, striving for the brilliance of her most glorious years in the film industry, an eighteen-year-old girl with “pink

palms” and “ruddy cheeks” (Fitzgerald 1980: 63) Rosemary Hoyt rises – a symbol of the revitalizing power of the younger generation. For the needs of the scientific study, her presence in the novel is examined through the prism of her participation in the popular production “Daddy's Girl”. The lack of speech that marks the girl's on-screen appearance is indicative of the dynamics in the family environment, conditioned by the authoritative patronage of the mother, and Rosemary's meeting with the Diver family and their joint trip to Paris is the reason for the realization of the transition from “silence” to “sound” in her personal story, similar to the revolutionary novelty in the film industry of the 1920s. The name of the film is also subject to analysis – a provocation with an implicit sexual subtext. Dick appears as a father figure for his two “little girls” – Nicole and Rosemary, with both of whom he has a romantic relationship. In the first case, Dick himself assigns himself the role of protector of a patient with a neurosis that developed after sexual violence inflicted on her by her own father. It is this storyline that further problematizes the theme of the “daddy's girl”, which is present in its perversion in the delineation of the relationships in Nicole's family. In the second case, Dick again views himself as a savior, but this time of a much younger girl, who shares the innocence of the “patients” to whom he usually develops an attachment, as the novel emphasizes the age difference between the two characters several times.

In Vladimir Nabokov's novel “Laughter in the Dark”, the theme of cinematography is also brought to a leading position. We choose the starting point of our analytical reading to be the title, which forces us to make the reservation that in the original in Russian it is „Кamera обcкupa“. The term has a rich history, dating back to antiquity, and is widely used in various visual arts, but nowadays it refers to an optical device used in photography, which works on the principle of an inverted image – a projection of an external scene onto

an internal surface by passing light through a small opening. In this sense, the reference to cinema is already implied at the titular level, and it in turn is tied to the theme of Albinus' blindness. In the context of the novel, we interpret the presence of a reflected image as a sign of unreliability, which is argued by Margot's ambition to "shine" on the big screen, from where she will appear different to herself every time, because she will be in a role. The hypothetical judgment also relies on the fact that the image is blurred and inverted, which is a demonstration of the way the hero perceives Margot – initially he is strongly attracted by her mysterious appearance in a movie theater, and subsequently curiosity grows into love, which so strongly clouds his rational judgment that he does not correctly decipher the motives behind the young girl's consent for the two of them to establish an intimate relationship.

The final lines in the novel are also interesting, as they provide details of the murder of Albinus, which plays out as if it were a scene from a silent film – during the chase, the inhabitants of the house do not make a sound. Instead, only the trajectory of their movement is traced, set by orientation markers that the blind man registers through one of his working senses – the scent of perfume, the smell of sweat, rapid breathing, the warmth of someone's body, etc. The last instructions are reminiscent of an extract from a script in which a description of the material world serving as the setting for the tragic event is proposed – "The door – wide open. The table – pushed aside by it. The carpet – bulging to the feet of the table like a frozen wave. The chair – fallen near a dead man in a worn-out brown suit and felt slippers. The pistol is not visible. It is under the man (...) The door that leads from the corridor to the landing is also wide open" (Nabokov 2024: 405).

Apart from its literary variations, where it receives diverse uses, we focus our attention on the topic of cinema, present in film art.

In “Downton Abbey: A New Era” (2022), one of the contemporary trends of the time is captured – the increasingly regular relocation of the filming process outside the film studios intended for it and its direction to the so-called “open locations”, which is the aristocratic home of the Crawley family. The imposition of sound is also the subject of creative interpretation in the hit American musical from 1952 “Singing in the Rain”. The production puts on the agenda a large part of the problems accompanying innovations in cinema, giving them a comical tone – the skepticism that gripped the representatives of the older generation of actors, who did not believe that the talkies would replace silent films; the grueling preparation for working with modern equipment, which is a prerequisite for the emergence of complications in adapting to the new conditions, the audio going out of sync, the wrong placement of microphones on the set, whose range does not pick up the actors' speech clearly enough, etc. An original and masterful reading of the artistic changes commented on so far is the French film “The Artist” (2011), which simultaneously pays homage to the golden classics of silent cinema, as it was conceived and filmed in a way that replicates their model (black-and-white shots, titles, film sizing), and addresses current events in the film industry in the 1920s. In “Babylon” (2022), the path to Hollywood fame and success during the transition period is presented through the already learned paradigm – the macho and sex symbol of silent cinema, Jack Conrad, loses his significance as sound makes its way to the film studios, and the young and assertive actress Nellie LaRoy secures screen time after the introduction of innovations in the industry.

The development stages of the female image are also traced, as well as the dominant perceptual attitudes towards the accompanying notions of femininity that have become established in the public sphere. The transformation process from the Victorian era to the “Roaring Twenties” goes through three phases – from the submissive

wife and mother, called the “Angel of the House”, through the “Gibson Girl”, who gave voice to her liberation from traditional prescriptions, to the “flapper girl”, who is characterized by an unprecedented behavioral frivolity that is at odds with the ethical code of restrained moralists.

Several literary titles belonging to American literature (“The Beautiful and the Damned”, “The Great Gatsby”, “The Sun Also Rises”, “Bernice Bobs her Hair”) are highlighted, in which the woman of the 1920s is captured in her most typical manifestations in the artistic field – as independent and self-sufficient, as a tempting and dangerous presence in men’s lives. In this image, she appears more often in American than in English literature, where there is also no shortage of women modeled on the foreign paradigm, although they are not brought into a leading position. The specific techniques for cinema in the artistic transformation of the particularly alluring woman of the 1920s with her obvious distinction from traditional stereotypical overlays are also discussed. Filmmakers concentrate primarily on building a visually impressive aesthetic, tied to fashion trends. The study of film materials also led to the conclusion that on the small and big screen, a woman's independence is most frequently demonstrated through her professional activities, the scope of which was significantly expanded in the 1920s, in some cases making her equal in importance in the relevant field to men – she can be a doctor, fashion designer, scientist, athlete, etc., and if she decides to indulge in her pleasure aspirations – an actress, cabaret singer and/or dancer.

There is increased interest in creating biographical films about women who built careers during the studied period in various professional fields. Examples of this are the films “Agatha” (1979), whose crime plot focuses on the disappearance of writer Agatha Christie from her home in 1926, “Agatha and the Truth of Murder” (2018), in which Christie, like her character Poirot, embarks on a

criminal investigation, “Bessie” (2015), tracing the path to fame in the 1920s and 1930s of the legendary singer Bessie Smith, “Zelda” (1993) and “Z: The Beginning of Everything”, dedicated to F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife, “Marguerite” (2015), inspired by the American film and stage actress Margaret Dumont, “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” (2020), which opens a look at the creative process and dishonest practices in the music business in 1927 in Chicago, “Becoming Astrid” (2018), a biographical story about the life of Swedish writer Astrid Lindgren, “Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle” (1994) tells the story of the private creative meetings of a group of American writers, critics, and actors, including Dorothy Parker, in the period 1919-1929, and “Vita and Virginia” (2018), which filmed the intimate relationship between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West .

The French “*Années folles*” (*crazy years*) are also drawn into the focus of the scientific research through a specific cultural model – **“the American in Paris”**, which proves to be favorable for artistic presentation in both literature and cinema. In a comparative perspective, three works by representatives of the “Lost Generation” are considered – “The Sun Also Rises” and “Moveable Feast” by Hemingway and “Babylon Revisited” by Fitzgerald. Their study led to the imposition of the hypothesis of residence in Paris as unsatisfactory, hence overturning the initial attitudes of an alternative space to American reality, which carries the potential to save its inhabitants from the disbelief that has gripped them. In cinema, this model is examined in detail in the work of Woody Allen. The hit production “Midnight in Paris” builds the visual representation of the French capital through the idea of an “moveable feast” – the camera selectively follows the previously marked urban areas, without making deviations to the poorer and unsightly neighborhoods of the capital, in order to fit into the somewhat clichéd image of Paris as festive and romantic. The sets, fashion decisions and selected music, all in full

sync with the spirit of the era, further reinforce the feeling of solemnity. It is important for Allen to keep it on the territory and in contemporary Paris, in order to hint to the viewer about the final scene and its message – although Adriana, initially recognized as the embodiment of the ideal, does not meet Gil's expectations, despite being part of the perfect “golden age” of the 1920s, he nevertheless meets a woman he finds to be a like-minded person, and, to his surprise, a woman who physically belongs to the present. The conclusion that Allen leads the viewer to is that once it has left the dreamer's consciousness and has been successfully realized in reality, the fantasy inevitably undergoes its own transformation process and brings bitterness to its creator. Its beautiful shell makes it tempting, and when it is precisely this shell that is removed, which metaphorically occurs during its transformation into something real, the illusion is doomed to lose its magical charge. The idea of the excessive romanticization of an object that exists outside our individual ideas about it is also related to the depiction of the city itself, so spectacular and charming only because it is a constructive element of the fantasy of the exemplary time.

II. The American 1920s

In **the second part** of the scientific work, attention is focused on two novelistic works – “The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald and “Jazz” by Toni Morrison. The former appears in the American literary canon as an example of the representational models of the 1920s, and by the end of the 20th century, as a result of the expanded range of distribution, Fitzgerald's hero began to be attributed an iconic status. The American literary critic Harold Bloom states that today

“The Great Gatsby” is part of what we call “American mythology”, and the author of the novel has a “mythological status”¹.

Fitzgerald's novel dissects certain behavioral patterns that had become established as characteristic of American reality in the 1920s as a direct result of the existing social conditions, and penetrates beyond the most obvious and superficial layers of the represented temporal segment to expose it in its multifaceted nature. The text offers a critical reading of the renewal processes, making its way to the dark and frightening side of a seemingly blissful and abundant existence, to demonstrate how the unconscious discrepancy between expectations and reality can be the cause of disappointing and disastrous consequences.

An interpretation is offered of the constructs of the era that were fundamental to Fitzgerald – the echoes of the war, the concept of the American dream, the rise and fall of Jay Gatsby, the loss of idealism, social belonging and class division in America in the 1920s, the role of the mass media, the cinematic techniques used, the automotive rhetoric and symbolism, the image of the “flapper”, the references to local crime and corrupt practices, and the musical references.

Although not without certain reservations, “The Great Gatsby” fits into the series of plots in the literary field of the 1920s that make a claim for engagement with the deification of World War I. The novel does not reflect the armed conflict itself, since the events are set outside the time frame associated with direct combat, and the sporadic appearance of references to political and military events of the second decade of the 20th century indicates their secondary position in relation to the main conflict. Their presence in the text is more like a “barrier to the past” (Berman 1989: 86), while the portal to it is opened

¹ Bloom 2010.

through experiences associated with other events in the characters' personal history.

The end of the war and the privileged position in which the United States found itself lay at the heart of a rethinking of an already familiar idea – the pursuit of the so-called “American dream”, which gradually established itself as a fundamental philosophy for the national culture, fueling the idealistic vision of an equal and socially mobile society. Fitzgerald is uncompromising in its criticism of material culture in the context of the “Roaring Twenties”, when the American dream was undergoing yet another reconceptualization, so that it was identified with physically achievable goods, accessible thanks to the increasing opportunities for enrichment and distorted understandings of morality.

Directly linked to the material world, to which all the characters attach serious importance, is the theme of the loss of idealism, whose gradual unfolding follows a regressive trajectory until it reaches its ultimate point of complete despair and ruin. Its key representative in Gatsby's story is the green light shining from the dock, located on the opposite side of the bay. There are three phases that Gatsby goes through before he realizes that he is forced to face the remains of the once beautiful dream that completely conquered his spirit and mind, and the approach to each of them is undertaken in unison with the light and the power of its radiation – if at the beginning of the novel it is the only visible source of the tearing spiritual darkness, then at the end it has melted away together with all the longings that it previously kept alive.

The theme of wealth and social belonging is also brought to a leading position in the delineation of the various spatial landmarks, whose geographical accuracy is deliberately detailed to correspond to the class differentiation in the 1920s – *old money*, which includes

representatives of society such as Daisy and Tom Buchanan, as well as Jordan Baker, who are perceived as the most sophisticated sample of the American aristocracy, because they belong to wealthy families and the wealth they have is inherited through the family line; *new money*, who have accumulated their welfare not through hereditary lines, but through their own efforts, in the 1920s aided mainly by the newly emerged opportunities for wealth through illegal transactions and extremely dubious contacts; those belonging to the lower social strata or the so-called *no money*. In the novel they're represented by George and Myrtle Wilson, as well as all the other characters inhabiting the Valley of Ashes and sharing the fate of the working man, who never achieves acceptable living conditions and remains deprived of the right to benefit from whatever material and social benefits.

Two levels of contrasting comparisons are deployed – on the one hand, with their extravagant lifestyle, the wealthy residents of the East and the West Egg are opposed to the destitute and tormented inhabitants of the Valley of Ashes – an ominous area located between one of the villages and the nearby metropolis (New York), and on the other hand, a distinguishing mark, reduced not only to their physical distance due to the presence of a bay, is also placed between the two Eggs, depicted asynchronously in terms of architecture and the lineage of the established families.

In “The Great Gatsby” the automobile is included in the list of false symbols of prosperity, which suggests that the vehicle is an instrument of destruction, not a sign of civilizational progress. Indicative of Fitzgerald's negative attitude towards the most large-scale innovation of his time are several scenes describing unfortunate road accidents, the sequential accumulation of which inevitably prepares the novel's action for the climactic collision with a tragic ending – the death of Myrtle. Fitzgerald's characters rely on their cars

not only to provide quick and easy transportation from one point to another, but also to declare their social status.

The second novel – “Jazz”, is taken up for analysis in order to explore the possible points of interaction between literature and music, in particular the leading musical genre of the era – jazz. The interpretation is built on the basis of comparing the structure of the novel with that of the musical composition and its main elements (improvisation, egalitarianism, interruption of the main melody and return to it, historical contextualization and incorporation of romantic elements), which are indicated in order to explain their function. The improvisational bias in jazz is brought out as a counterpoint to the gramophone records, whose repetitiveness Morrison resorts to in order to compare it with the cyclicity in the lives of her characters. The synchronization of the representation of jazz in the novel with the bipolar attitudes that the musical genre engenders in American citizens is also noted – the jazz music is an expression of the freedom-loving and artistic spirit, but it’s also a dangerous phenomenon, inciting immoral and sinful acts ².

III. The British 1920s

The third chapter is engaged in studying the representational patterns of the 1920s in five English novels – Evelyn Waugh’s

² „Jazz in whatever form, was not a completely respectable music in the twenties (...) Americans disliked jazz because as rib-rock Protestants they were uncomfortable with the idea of music’s existing for sensual pleasure, for the joy of the vulgarity that is symbolized and elicited. This fear transcended color; many blacks ostracized their brothers and sisters who played the music, and it was common for the believers to call jazz and blues “the devil’s music” (Early 1994: 117).

“Decline and Fall”, “Vile Bodies” and “Brideshead Revisited”, Aldous Huxley’s “Antic Hay” and Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs. Dalloway”.

Waugh’s pessimistic worldview, expressed in satirical tone, was a major force in the construction of artistic convention in his first work of fiction “Decline and Fall” (1928), which in a sense prepared the ground for everything that was more thoroughly developed by Waugh two years later in “Vile Bodies”. Social satire takes aim at certain disturbing trends characteristic of British society in the 1920s – the turn to the material and the abandonment of spiritual orientations, the hypocrisy in friendships and love relationships, the undisciplined and spoiled representatives of youth (the members of the Bollinger Club³ and the students), the school environment as a temple not of knowledge, but of greed.

In “Vile Bodies” (1930), the claim that “Waugh sees the modern world as dangerously chaotic and hopelessly insane” (Meckier 1973: 166) is convincingly defended by the author himself. In order to fulfill his plan and construct an insensitive, artificial and amoral world in which money has enough power and authority to guide human relationships, the English author relies on a whole spectrum of themes relevant to life in the 1920s. Waugh mercilessly satirizes the British youth of the post-war period, who declared a total rejection of the puritanical Victorian model and indulged in aimless pursuits, as well as the representatives of the media sphere, who made the denunciation of any immoral manifestation their main cause.

³ The prototype of Bollinger is probably the Bullingdon Club, founded in 1780 at the University of Oxford. The original idea was for the club to be a sports club – to hold horse races, fox hunting and cricket games. Later, it became private, with access only to the wealthiest students, arrogant sons of upper-class families. The grand banquets organized turned into unbridled drinking parties, which also led to vandalism in public places.

The author demonstrates his condemnatory attitude towards modern society, composed of uneducated and illiterate individuals ⁴ who are neither aware of their intellectual deficiency, nor subject to re-education, but nevertheless occupy positions in the state system, from whose height they hand out assessments with undeniable validity. Among them are those in power, brought to the head of the state, who are condemned as the main ones responsible for the reproduction of erroneous and harmful models, followed unreservedly by their peers.

The inability of the characters to articulate their thoughts clearly enough as a result of the authentic literary language being replaced by slang phrases is also brought into focus. Saying and writing too many words does not compensate for the tendency to empty them of content, but only emphasizes the great difficulties that arise in memorizing what has already been heard or read, whose stable position in the mind is constantly displaced by the influx of new information, often extremely insignificant. The development of this trend is reflected in the print media, whose main priority is not the creation of quality, but of fast journalism, spewing out sensational materials on a conveyor belt. In this new world, the rules also dictate that what is written in the gossip columns of the tabloids, always pushed aside by high prose, construct reality, and even has the power to replace it through the suggestions and messages it sends.

In the British writer's artistic world, the symbols of technological evolution, part of which is the diversity of vehicles and their ubiquitous use during the decade in question, function with a

⁴“With the help of a printed list that began with ‘Aristotle, Works (Illustrated)’, they went through Adam’s books one by one, **painfully spelling out the titles**” (Waugh 1986: 230). “I got a lot of things right. When I see a dirty word, I know what it means, **otherwise I wouldn’t have gotten to where you see me here today**” (Waugh 1986: 231).

purpose that deviates from their original intent. The only advantage progress “can bring is the perishable one of novelty; when that has worn off, the machine is empty of any value, having added nothing in the way of real aesthetic enjoyment or spiritual life“ (Allen 1994: 323). Man is destined to find himself in the position of a victim of technological progress, which, instead of bringing order and facilitating daily existence, does just the opposite, secretly and persistently navigating its user on the path to ruin. The phenomenon, the author warns, becomes even more uncontrollable and dangerous because of the general disinterest and blindness that underlies the greatly blunted ability to register it and decisively eliminate it.

In “Vile Bodies” the premonition of a new impending catastrophe justifies the lack of drive among young people to build lasting relationships, comply with norms and rules, and seek a stable center – the risk of a carefully constructed personal world undergoing a violent collapse triggered from the outside is too great to be taken, especially when the pain and disappointment may prove insurmountable. This also explains the “fatal striving for eternity“ that infected an entire generation and inspired its daring exploits.

The comparison of “Decline and Fall” and “Vile Bodies” with a work belonging to the later stage of Waugh's career, “Brideshead Revisited” (1945), is singled out as necessary in order to establish whether the hypothesis of a turning point in the author's attitudes towards the decade would be justified. While in the early novels the 1920s are exposed in their vulnerability, in “Brideshead Revisited” they are subjected to a remodeling. The melancholic approach to the reconstruction of the 1920s is conditioned by the distance of time, which gave rise to a rethinking of experienced and reenacted events from the past and opened a nostalgic perspective on some of them as a result of the fulfilled prophecy, present in Waugh's previous works, about the onset of a new, even more terrible and uncertain time in

human history, which released all its destructive potential with the outbreak of World War II. The thematic spectrum on which Waugh relies for the artistic representation of the third decade of the 20th century in his other works (“Decline and Fall”, “Vile Bodies”) is also deployed here, although not to its full capacity, but only through some of its dominants, fitting the plot – the impermanence of euphoric sensations, illegal practices in the centers of debauchery, the escape from reality, accomplished not without the auxiliary function of alcohol, the car as an appendage to the reputable image imposed in public circles, as a savior from oppression, but also as a dangerous ally.

No less ruthless than Waugh is Aldous Huxley, who in “Antic Hay” compromises the idea of a happy and carefree existence by deploying a whole palette of colorful characters, for whom pretense is a basic element of the theatrical act, applied in an attempt to conceal their true nature, imbued with pain, disappointment and sadness. With the addition of the third author – Virginia Woolf, the British 1920s partially changed its appearance. In “Mrs. Dalloway” the comic and ironic shades inherent in Waugh and Huxley are missing, and in their place is the “stream of consciousness” technique favored by Woolf, which suggests a deeper psychologization. The fragmentary narratological model sets the retrospective shifts in time and adherence to several points of view, which, in turn, is in harmony with the dissociative spirit of the era. Woolf is deeply interested in the relationship between life and death, and by consistently tracing their manifestations in the artistic text – the memory of the war, the collapse of psychic foundations and the irreversible course of time against the celebrations that Clarissa organizes as a resistance to the feeling of decay and as an affirmation of life, we build our contextual reading of the novel. The thematic spectrum of the work and our interpretation

also includes the question of the unequal class system, as well as the innovations that ennobled the lives of women in the 1920s.

Conclusion

The research and analysis work carried out led to several significant conclusions regarding the representations of the 1920s in literature and cinema. Although the scope of the study was not subject to maximum expansion, the literary and film titles included in it proved to be a reliable basis for compiling a matrix to guide us in forming our final impressions. First of all, it seems important to us to clearly distinguish the tangible discrepancy between the historical context and its fictionalization – while the 1920s exist in public imagination as a period marked by the unrestrained enthusiasm for the long-awaited renewal processes that occurred, akin to an almost utopian space of immense possibilities, the literature, engaged in its artistic re-creation, models the vision of it through the critical sense of the negative aspect of changes and the skepticism generated by the premonition (or knowledge) of the inevitable end of idealistic existence. Secondly, the approaches to representing the decade in literature and cinema are not entirely uniform – in most cases, writers are not afraid to resort to serious issues, while filmmakers rely on stories with an entertaining character and visually lush images. However, we must make the reservation that the stated judgment regarding literary production applies with greater validity to works created in the 20th century, since more modern interpretations are also tempted to rely on banal stereotypes, from which clichéd plots arise.

The comparison made between the themes and models of recreating the era taken for study in the two national literatures (American and English) through their samples led to the establishment that serious discrepancies in terms of content are not registered – in

both American and British context, the symbolic signs of progress for the decade are loaded with negative connotations.

We approached the preparation of this study with the ambition to cover the widest possible spectrum of cultural and historical processes, to study their fictional manifestations and to discover patterns in their presentation. However, the initial idea could not be fully realized before works from other national literatures in Western Europe are also attracted to the scientific corpus. Due to the unabated interest in the decade and the systematic publication of new books and making of new films, the issue is in development and is subject to additional reflections and systematizations.

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Scientific contributions of the dissertation work

1. The dissertation highlights the most recognizable components of the 1920s, which are first placed in a socio-economic and cultural context, and subsequently are made meaningful through their intense manifestations different literary and cinematic works.
2. The observations are presented in parallel in a synchronic and diachronic plan in order to establish the similarities and differences in the approach to constructing the vision for the represented decade – on the one hand, in the literary works created in the 1920s, and on the other, in those that work in a retrospective mode.
3. The models of recreating the era are outlined in two national literatures – American and English, which opens a productive perspective for comparing the researched material.
4. The dissertation outlines the stages of development of the preferred thematizations of the 1920s in three of the novels of the English writer Evelyn Waugh, in order to enrich the receptive attitude towards them.
5. A comprehensive interpretation of a novel that has not yet been translated into Bulgarian and often remains beyond the reach of critical attention is proposed – “Antic Hay” by Aldous Huxley.
6. The dissertation claims to be interdisciplinary, as it does not remain solely within the boundaries of the literary field, but identifies and analyzes possible points of interaction between literature and music, in particular jazz, as well as the continuity between literature and cinema.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation

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